



# **Commentary on Psalms - Volume 3**

by

*John Calvin*

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# Table of Contents

<i>About This Book</i> . . . . .	p. ii
Commentary on Psalms 67-92. . . . .	p. 1
Psalm 67. . . . .	p. 2
Psalm 67:1-7. . . . .	p. 2
Psalm 68. . . . .	p. 4
Psalm 68:1-6. . . . .	p. 4
Psalm 68:7-10. . . . .	p. 7
Psalm 68:11-14. . . . .	p. 9
Psalm 68:15-17. . . . .	p. 13
Psalm 68:18-24. . . . .	p. 15
Psalm 68:25-27. . . . .	p. 20
Psalm 68:28-30. . . . .	p. 22
Psalm 68:31-35. . . . .	p. 25
Psalm 69. . . . .	p. 28
Psalm 69:1-5. . . . .	p. 28
Psalm 69:6-9. . . . .	p. 32
Psalm 69:10-13. . . . .	p. 35
Psalm 69:14-18. . . . .	p. 37
Psalm 69:19-21. . . . .	p. 38
Psalm 69:22-29. . . . .	p. 40
Psalm 69:30-33. . . . .	p. 46
Psalm 69:34-36. . . . .	p. 47
Psalm 70. . . . .	p. 49
Psalm 70:1-5. . . . .	p. 49
Psalm 71. . . . .	p. 50
Psalm 71:1-4. . . . .	p. 50
Psalm 71:5-8. . . . .	p. 51
Psalm 71:9-13. . . . .	p. 53
Psalm 71:14-16. . . . .	p. 55
Psalm 71:17-19. . . . .	p. 57
Psalm 71:20-24. . . . .	p. 59
Psalm 72. . . . .	p. 61
Psalm 72:1-6. . . . .	p. 62
Psalm 72:7-11. . . . .	p. 65
Psalm 72:12-15. . . . .	p. 68

Psalm 72:16-20. . . . .	p. 69
Psalm 73. . . . .	p. 73
Psalm 73:1-3. . . . .	p. 73
Psalm 73:4-9. . . . .	p. 77
Psalm 73:10-14. . . . .	p. 80
Psalm 73:15-17. . . . .	p. 84
Psalm 73:18-20. . . . .	p. 86
Psalm 73:21-24. . . . .	p. 89
Psalm 73:25-28. . . . .	p. 92
Psalm 74. . . . .	p. 96
Psalm 74:1-8. . . . .	p. 97
Psalm 74:9-12. . . . .	p. 102
Psalm 74:13-17. . . . .	p. 104
Psalm 74:18-23. . . . .	p. 107
Psalm 75. . . . .	p. 110
Psalm 75:1-7. . . . .	p. 110
Psalm 75:8-10. . . . .	p. 114
Psalm 76. . . . .	p. 117
Psalm 76:1-6. . . . .	p. 117
Psalm 76:7-12. . . . .	p. 120
Psalm 77. . . . .	p. 124
Psalm 77:1-6. . . . .	p. 124
Psalm 77:7-10. . . . .	p. 127
Psalm 77:11-14. . . . .	p. 130
Psalm 77:15-20. . . . .	p. 132
Psalm 78. . . . .	p. 136
Psalm 78:1-6. . . . .	p. 136
Psalm 78:7-11. . . . .	p. 140
Psalm 78:12-16. . . . .	p. 144
Psalm 78:17-22. . . . .	p. 145
Psalm 78:23-25. . . . .	p. 147
Psalm 78:26-31. . . . .	p. 149
Psalm 78:32-37. . . . .	p. 150
Psalm 78:38-41. . . . .	p. 152
Psalm 78:42-51. . . . .	p. 155
Psalm 78:52-58. . . . .	p. 158
Psalm 78:59-66. . . . .	p. 161
Psalm 78:67-72. . . . .	p. 164
Psalm 79. . . . .	p. 169
Psalm 79:1-4. . . . .	p. 169

Psalm 79:5-9. . . . .	p. 171
Psalm 79:10-13. . . . .	p. 175
Psalm 80. . . . .	p. 177
Psalm 80:1-3. . . . .	p. 178
Psalm 80:4-7. . . . .	p. 179
Psalm 80:8-13. . . . .	p. 180
Psalm 80:14-19. . . . .	p. 182
Psalm 81. . . . .	p. 186
Psalm 81:1-3. . . . .	p. 186
Psalm 81:8-12. . . . .	p. 190
Psalm 81:13-16. . . . .	p. 193
Psalm 82. . . . .	p. 197
Psalm 82:1-4. . . . .	p. 197
Psalm 82:5-8. . . . .	p. 200
Psalm 83. . . . .	p. 203
Psalm 83:1-4. . . . .	p. 203
Psalm 83:5-8. . . . .	p. 205
Psalm 83:9-12. . . . .	p. 207
Psalm 83:13-18. . . . .	p. 209
Psalm 84. . . . .	p. 212
Psalm 84:1-4. . . . .	p. 212
Psalm 84:5-7. . . . .	p. 215
Psalm 84:8-11. . . . .	p. 218
Psalm 85. . . . .	p. 221
Psalm 85:1-4. . . . .	p. 221
Psalm 85:5-8. . . . .	p. 223
Psalm 85:9-13. . . . .	p. 225
Psalm 86. . . . .	p. 229
Psalm 86:1-7. . . . .	p. 229
Psalm 86:8-11. . . . .	p. 231
Psalm 86:12-17. . . . .	p. 234
Psalm 87. . . . .	p. 237
Psalm 87:1-3. . . . .	p. 239
Psalm 87:4-6. . . . .	p. 241
Psalm 87:7. . . . .	p. 243
Psalm 88. . . . .	p. 245
Psalm 88:1-5. . . . .	p. 246
Psalm 88:6-9. . . . .	p. 248
Psalm 88:10-13. . . . .	p. 249
Psalm 88:14-18. . . . .	p. 250

Psalm 89. . . . .	p. 252
Psalm 89:1-4. . . . .	p. 252
Psalm 89:5-8. . . . .	p. 255
Psalm 89:9-14. . . . .	p. 256
Psalm 89:15-18. . . . .	p. 258
Psalm 89:19-23. . . . .	p. 260
Psalm 89:24-29. . . . .	p. 262
Psalm 89:30-37. . . . .	p. 264
Psalm 89:38-45. . . . .	p. 269
Psalm 89:46-48. . . . .	p. 272
Psalm 89:49-52. . . . .	p. 274
Psalm 90. . . . .	p. 277
Psalm 90:1-2. . . . .	p. 277
Psalm 90:3-8. . . . .	p. 279
Psalm 90:9-10. . . . .	p. 282
Psalm 90:11-13. . . . .	p. 283
Psalm 90:14-17. . . . .	p. 286
Psalm 91. . . . .	p. 288
Psalm 91:1-4. . . . .	p. 288
Psalm 91:5-8. . . . .	p. 290
Psalm 91:9-12. . . . .	p. 291
Psalm 91:13-16. . . . .	p. 294
Psalm 92. . . . .	p. 297
Psalm 92:1-4. . . . .	p. 297
Psalm 92:5-8. . . . .	p. 299
Psalm 92:9-11. . . . .	p. 301
Psalm 92:12-13. . . . .	p. 303
Translation of Psalms 67-92. . . . .	p. 305
Indexes. . . . .	p. 306
Index of Scripture References. . . . .	p. 306
Index of Scripture Commentary. . . . .	p. 309
Greek Words and Phrases. . . . .	p. 310
Hebrew Words and Phrases. . . . .	p. 312
Latin Words and Phrases. . . . .	p. 321
French Words and Phrases. . . . .	p. 323

**COMMENTARY  
ON  
THE BOOK OF PSALMS  
BY JOHN CALVIN**

**TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL LATIN, AND COLLATED  
WITH THE AUTHOR'S FRENCH VERSION,  
BY THE REV. JAMES ANDERSON**

**VOLUME THIRD**

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# PSALM 67

The following psalm contains a prayer for a blessing upon the Church, that besides being preserved in a state of safety in Judea, it might be enlarged to a new and unprecedented extent. It touches shortly upon the kingdom of God, which was to be erected in the world upon the coming of Christ. <sup>1</sup>

*To the chief musician on Neginoth. A psalm or song.*

## Psalm 67:1-7

**1.** God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us. Selah. <sup>2</sup> **2.** That they may know thy way upon the earth, thy salvation among all nations. **3.** Let the people praise thee, O God! let all the people praise thee. **4.** Let the nations be glad, and shout for joy; for he shall judge the people righteously, and thou shalt govern the nations upon earth. Selah. **5.** Let the people praise thee, O God: let all the people praise thee. **6.** The earth has given its increase; and God, even our own God!, will bless us. **7.** God shall bless us, <sup>3</sup> and all ends of the earth shall fear him.

**1** *God be merciful unto us, and bless us* The psalm contains a prediction of Christ's kingdom, under which the whole world was to be adopted into a privileged relationship with God; but the Psalmist begins by praying for the Divine blessing, particularly upon the Jews. They were the first-born, (Exodus 4:22,) and the blessing was to terminate upon them first, and then go out to all the surrounding nations. I have used the imperative mood throughout the psalm, as other translators have done, although the future tense, which is that employed in the Hebrew, would suit sufficiently well, and the passage might be understood as encouraging the minds of the Lord's people to trust in the continuance and increase of the Divine favor. The words, however, are generally construed in the form of a prayer, and I merely threw out this as a suggestion. Speaking, as the Psalmist does, of those who belonged to the Church of God, and not of those who were without, it is noticeable that yet he traces all the blessings they received to God's free favor; and from this we may learn, that so long as we are here, we owe our happiness, our success, and prosperity, entirely to the same cause. This being the case, how shall any think to anticipate his goodness by merits of their own? *The light of God's countenance* may refer either to the sense of his love shed abroad in our hearts, or to the actual manifestation of it without, as, on the other hand, his face may be said to be clouded,

<sup>1</sup> With this agrees the opinion of the ancient Jews, who apply this psalm *to future times*, to the world to come, the times of the Messiah. The particular time and occasion of its composition can only be conjectured. Bishop Patrick thinks that it was probably composed by David, when, having brought the ark to Jerusalem and offered sacrifices, as promised in the psalm foregoing, verse 15, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of Hosts, (2 Samuel 6:17, 18.) Horsley views it as "a hymn for the feast of tabernacles, prophetic of a general conversion of the world to the worship of God." Calmet is of opinion that the composition of this, as well as of the two preceding psalms, was posterior to the return of the Jews from Babylon; and that the particular occasion was the restoration of fertility to the soil after the protracted drought and scarcity recorded by the prophet Haggai, (Haggai 1:10,11; 2:17-19.) But though the particular time and occasion on which it was written cannot with certainty be determined, it is evidently a prayer of the ancient Church for the appearance of the Messiah, and the universal diffusion of his gospel.

<sup>2</sup> This verse contains a manifest allusion to the blessings which the priests were taught to pronounce upon the people of Israel, (Numbers 6:24-26.)

<sup>3</sup> *God, even our own God, will bless us, God shall bless us.* There is here again clearly an allusion to the formula of blessing in Numbers 6:24-26, where the name of God is, as here, repeated three times in succession.



when he strikes terrors into our conscience on account of our sins, or withdraws the outward marks of his favor.

**2** *That they may know thy way upon the earth.* Here we have a clear prophecy of that extension of the grace of God by which the Gentiles were united into one body with the posterity of Abraham. The Psalmist prays for some conspicuous proof of favor to be shown his chosen people, which might attract the Gentiles to seek participation in the same blessed hope. <sup>4</sup> By the *way of God* is meant his covenant, which is the source or spring of salvation, and by which he discovered himself in the character of a Father to his ancient people, and afterwards more clearly under the Gospel, when the Spirit of adoption was shed abroad in greater abundance. <sup>5</sup> Accordingly, we find Christ himself saying,

“This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God,”  
(John 17:3)

**3** *Let the people praise thee, O God!* Having spoken of all nations participating in the saving knowledge of God, he next tells us that they would proclaim his goodness, and exhorts them to the exercise of gratitude. The repetition used clearly shows of itself that he alludes to an event of a new and unprecedented kind. Had the allusion been to some such manifestation of his favor as he ordinarily made to the Jews, we would not have looked for the same vehemency of expression. First he says, *Let the people praise thee*; then he adds, *Let all the people praise thee*. Afterwards he repeats the exclamation once more. But he appropriately makes mention, between, of *rejoicing*, and the occasion there was for it, since it is impossible that we can praise God aright, unless our minds be tranquil and cheerful — unless, as persons reconciled to God, we are animated with the hope of salvation, and “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding,” reign in our hearts, (Philippians 4:7.) The cause assigned for joy plainly in itself points to the event of the calling of the Gentiles. The reference is not to that government of God which is general in its nature, but to that special and spiritual jurisdiction which he exercises over the Church, in which he cannot properly be said to govern any but such as he has gathered under his sway by the doctrine of his law. The word *righteousness* is inserted in commendation of his government. Language almost identical is used by Isaiah and Micah when they speak of the times in which the word of salvation would be diffused throughout all the earth, (Isaiah 11:4; Micah 4:3.)

**6** *The earth has given its increase* Mention having been made of the principal act of the Divine favor, notice is next taken of the temporal blessings which he confers upon his children, that they may have everything necessary to complete their happiness. And here it is to be remembered, that every benefit which God bestowed upon his ancient people was, as it were, a light held out before the eyes of the world, to attract the attention of the nations to him. From this the Psalmist argues, that should God liberally supply the wants of his people, the consequence would be, to increase the fear of his name, since all ends of the earth would, by what they saw of his fatherly regard to his own, submit themselves with greater cheerfulness to his government.

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<sup>4</sup> “A fin que par la clarte d’icelle les Gentils soyent amenez a la participation de la mesme esperance.” — *Fr.*

<sup>5</sup> “The petition here offered is, that the Gospel, God’s ‘way,’ might be universally spread; — a prayer that is not yet accomplished, but is in progress towards completion. The mention of nations and peoples, all of them, intimates, that the time which is the object of supplication is the time when God will no longer be the God of the Jews, but of the Gentiles also.” — *Walford.*

# PSALM 68

In this psalm it was David's design to celebrate the victories which, through the blessing of God, he had gained over his enemies; <sup>6</sup> but, in the opening verses, he commends the power and goodness of God generally, as seen in the government of the world at large. From this he passes to the consideration of what God had done in redeeming his chosen people, and of the continued proofs of fatherly care which he had manifested to the posterity of Abraham. He then proceeds to the subject which he had more particularly in view, prosecuting it at length, and in terms of the most exalted description; praising the signal display of Divine power which he, and the whole nation with him, had experienced. Now that he had been made king, he infers that the Church was brought to a settled condition, and that God, who seemed to have departed, would now at length erect his throne, as it were, in the midst of it, and reign. In this it would evidently appear, that he designed, typically, to represent the glory of God afterwards to be manifested in Christ.

*To the chief musician. A psalm or song of David.*

## Psalm 68:1-6

**1.** God shall arise: his enemies shall be scattered; and they who hate him shall flee before him. **2.** As smoke is driven away, thou shalt drive them away; as wax melteth before the fire, the wicked shall perish from the presence of God. **3.** But the righteous shall be glad; they shall rejoice before God, and leap for exultation. **4.** Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: exalt him that rideth upon the clouds in Jah <sup>7</sup> his name, [or, in his name Jah,] and rejoice before him. **5.** A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in the habitation of his holiness. **6.** God who setteth the solitary in families, who bringeth, out those who are bound with chains; <sup>8</sup> but the rebellious shall dwell in a dry land.

<sup>6</sup> As to the time and occasion of the composition of this psalm, the majority of interpreters refer it to the translation of the ark from the house of Obed-Edom to Mount Zion, and with this every part of it would, no doubt, harmonize. But other critics, as Drs Geddes, Boothroyd, and Morrison, think (and Calvin's opinion seems to be the same) that it was penned after some great victory; probably after David's signal victory over the Ammonites and Syrians, when the ark was brought back in triumph to Jerusalem, (1 Chronicles 19:10-19.) That the ark accompanied the army in those ways we learn from the words of Uriah to David, in 2 Samuel 11:11, compared with 2 Samuel 12:31. As every thing under that dispensation was typical or prophetic, it is very natural to regard the triumphant manner in which the ark ascended the holy mountain, as an emblem of the far more triumphant and glorious ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ (of whom the ark, and the tabernacle, and the temple itself, were all figures) to the highest heavens, after he had overcome his own and his people's enemies; and in this application the 18th verse of this psalm is quoted by the Apostle Paul, (Ephesians 4:8, 9.)

This inspired composition, though highly sublime and beautiful, is universally acknowledged by critics to be of very difficult interpretation. Dr Adam Clarke pronounces it "the most difficult psalm in the whole Psalter;" and, after quoting the words of Simon de Muis, — who observes, that "it may not be improperly termed the torture of critics, and the reproach of commentators," — he says, "There are customs here referred to, which I do not fully understand: there are words whose meaning I cannot, to my own satisfaction, ascertain; and allusions which are to me inexplicable. Yet of the composition itself I have the highest opinion: — it is sublime beyond all comparison; — it is constructed with an art truly admirable; — it possesses all the dignity of the sacred language; — none but David could have composed it; and, at this lapse of time, it would require no small influence of the Spirit that was upon him to give its true interpretations."

<sup>7</sup> "C'est, Qui est Jah, ou l'Eternel?" — *Fr. marg.* "That is, Who is Jah, or Jehovah?" Jah seems simply a contraction of the word Jehovah, the name which expresses, as far as can be expressed by words, the essence, self-existence, and eternity of the Supreme Being.

<sup>8</sup> The original word *bakosharoth*, which Calvin renders, *with chains*, is rendered by Dathe, *ad abundantiam*; and by Berlin, *ad opimitates*; and is explained by Simeon, in his Lexicon, as "loca omnibus affluentia proprie abundantiae." According

**1. *God shall arise: his enemies shall be scattered*** In this verse the Psalmist intimates, as it were by way of preface, the subject which he proposed to treat in the psalm, and which related to the truth that God, however long he may seem to connive at the audacity and cruelty of the enemies of his Church, will eventually arise to avenge it, and will prove himself able to protect it by the mere forth-putting of his hand. I agree with other interpreters in thinking that the sentiment is borrowed from Moses, (Numbers 10:35) <sup>9</sup> There can be little doubt that in dictating the form of prayer there referred to, he had an eye to the instruction and comfort of all succeeding ages, and would teach the Lord's people confidently to rely for safety upon the ark of the covenant, which was the visible symbol of the Divine presence. We may notice this difference, however, that Moses addressed the words to God as a prayer, while David rather expresses his satisfaction and delight in what he saw daily fulfilling before his own eyes. Some indeed read, *Let God arise*; but they appear to misapprehend the scope of the Psalmist. He means to say that observation attested the truth which Moses had declared of God's needing only to rise up that all his enemies might be scattered before his irresistible power. Yet I see no objections to the other reading, provided the idea now mentioned be retained, and the words be considered as intimating that God needs no array of preparation in overthrowing his enemies, and can dissipate them with a breath. We are left to infer, that when his enemies at any time obtain an ascendancy, it is owing to an exercise of Divine forbearance, and that rage as they may, it is only with his permission; the time being not yet come for his rising. There is much comfort to be derived from the circumstance, that those who persecute the Church are here spoken of as *God's enemies*. When he undertakes our defense, he looks upon the injuries done to us as dishonors cast upon his Divine Majesty. The Psalmist adds a striking figure to illustrate how easily God can overthrow the machinations of our enemies, comparing them to *smoke which vanishes when blown upon by the wind, or wax which melts before the fire* <sup>10</sup> We consider it utterly incredible that such a formidable array of opposition should be made to disappear in a moment. But the Spirit takes this method of chiding the fearfulness of our carnal minds, and teaching us that there is no such strength in our enemies as we suppose, — that we allow the smoke of them to blind our eyes, and the solid mass of resistance which they present to deceive us into a forgetfulness of the truth, that the mountains themselves flow down at the presence of the Lord. <sup>11</sup>

**3 *But the righteous shall be glad*** It is here intimated by David, that when God shows himself formidable to the wicked, this is with the design of securing the deliverance of his Church. He would seem indirectly to contrast the joy of which he now speaks with the depression and grief felt

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to Gesenius, denotes "*happiness, abundance, prosperity*." The LXX. render it ἐν ἀνδρεία, *in strength, i e.*, bound firmly. Fry reads, "Bringing forth prisoners into scenes of plenty."

<sup>9</sup> That passage contains the words which Moses used when the ark began a procession. Whenever the tabernacle was moved, and the Levites marched onward, bearing upon their shoulders the ark of the covenant, and the whole host of Israel proceeded on their march, "Moses said, Rise up, Lord," etc. Martin observes, that "the God whom these opening words of the psalm have in view is manifestly the same of whom it is said in verse 18, that he ascended up on high, and led captivity captive. Now he of whom that is said, being, according to the interpretation of the Apostle Paul, (Ephesians 4:8.) Jesus Christ, the Son of God, it clearly follows that it was the Son of God, the true God, Jehovah the eternal God, whom the Prophet had in his eye in the first verse and in the rest of the psalm." See Appendix.

<sup>10</sup> *As wax melteth before the fire*, "a proverbial expression, denoting speedy dissolution, consumption, and death." — *Bythner*.

<sup>11</sup> "Sed quasi fumo hebetari nostros oculos; falli etiam nos in ipsa duritie, quia non reputamus solo Dei conspectu liquefieri montes ipsos." — *Lat.* "Mais qu'il y a comme une fumee qu'il nous esblouist les yeux; semblablement que nous nous abusons quant a leur durete et obstination; pource que nous ne venons point a considerer qu'au seul regard de Dieu les montagnes mesmes fondent et s'ecoulent." *Fr.*

by well affected men under the reign of Saul — suggesting, that God succeeds a season of temporary trouble with returns of comfort, to prevent his people from being overwhelmed by despondency. He leaves us also to infer, that one reason of that joy which they experience is derived from knowing that God is propitious to them, and interests himself in their safety. The Hebrew words, *מִיִּנְנֶה*, *mipne*, and *לִפְנֵה*, *liphne*, admit of the same meaning; but I think that the Psalmist intended to note a distinction. The wicked flee from the presence of God, as what inspires them with terror; the righteous again rejoice in it, because nothing delights them more than to think that God is near them. When commenting upon the passage, Psalm 18:26, we saw why the Divine presence terrifies some and comforts others; for “with the pure he will show himself pure, and with the froward he will show himself froward.” One expression is heaped by the Psalmist upon another, to show how great the joy of the Lord’s people is, and how entirely it possesses and occupies their affections.

4 *Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: exalt him*<sup>12</sup> *that rideth, etc.* He now proceeds to call upon the Lord’s people to praise God. And he begins by pointing out the grounds in general, as I have already hinted, which they have for this exercise, because he comprehends the whole world under his power and government, adding, that he condescends to take the poorest and the most wretched of our family under his protection. His infinite power is commended, when it is said that he *rides upon the clouds*, or the heavens,<sup>13</sup> for this proves that he sits superior over all things. The Holy Spirit may signify by the expression, that we should exclude from our minds every thing gross and earthly in the conceptions we form of him; but he would, doubtless, impress us chiefly with an idea of his great power, to produce in us a due reverence, and make us feel how far short all our praises must come of his glory. We would attempt in vain to comprehend heaven and earth; but his glory is greater than both. As to the expression which follows, *in Jah, his name*, there has been some difference of opinion. The Hebrew preposition *בְּ*, *beth*, may here, as sometimes it is, be a mere expletive, and we may read, *Jah is his name*<sup>14</sup> Others read, *in Jah is his name*;<sup>15</sup> and I have no

<sup>12</sup> The reading of the Septuagint is, Ὀδοποιήσατε, “Make way.” The Hebrew word *סוּלָה*, *sollu*, has this sense, as well as that of *exalt* In two passages in Isaiah, the forms of expression are very like the present passage, (Isaiah 57:14,) “Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way;” and (Isaiah 62:10,) “Cast up, cast up the highway.” Jerome has, “Praeparate viam,” “Prepare yea way.” Walford adopts the same translation, — “Prepare a way for him who rideth through the deserts,” — which he explains in the following note: “The imagery is borrowed from the custom of Eastern princes, who sent pioneers before their armies, to reduce the hills, and carry raised roads through the valleys, to facilitate their progress. God is described as riding through the deserts, from his having accompanied Israel through the wilderness, to conduct them to Canaan.”

<sup>13</sup> The word *בָּרָקִיעַ*, *baaraboth*, here rendered *the clouds, or the heavens*, is by the LXX. translated *the west*, as if it were derived from *ערב*, *ereb*, *evening*; and by the Vulgate, “Super occasum,” “Upon the going down of the sun.” Others translate it “deserts.” Thus, Jerome reads, “ascendenti per deserta,” “for him that rideth through the deserts.” In this he is followed by Dr Boothroyd, Bishops Lowth and Horsley, Drs Kennicott and Chandler, Fry, and others; but critics of no less note read *heavens*, as Paginus, Buxtorf, and Hammond. “The feminine *בָּרָקִיעַ*,” says this last critic, “is frequently taken for a *plain*, and so for *the desert*; but *בָּרָקִיעַ*, in the plural, is acknowledged by the Hebrews to signify *the heavens*.” The idea is altogether fanciful which has been put forth by some, that this word, which frequently signifies a *plain* or *desert*, is applied to the highest heavens, “either as being plain and void of stars, and so a kind of superior desert, without anything in it, or (as the learned Grotius piously conjectures from 1 Timothy 6:16) because, as a desert, it is ἀπρόσιτον, not approached or approachable by any.”

<sup>14</sup> This is the rendering in all the ancient versions, as the Septuagint, Chaldee, Syriac, Vulgate, etc. Many instances might be produced in which it is redundant; as, for example, Exodus 32:22, Proverbs 3:26

<sup>15</sup> This is the translation given by Horsley, who applies the passage to Christ; and his criticism upon it is excellent. “Upon mature consideration,” says he, “I am inclined to take the text as it stands, and render it literally with Jerome, ‘In Jah is his name;’ *i e.*, his name, who is riding through the wilderness, is in Jehovah, in the Self-existent One. He who led the armies of Israel through the wilderness, when they first came up from Egypt, was Christ. He who brought the captives home from Babylon was Christ. He who shall finally bring the revolted Jews home to his Church, and, in a literal sense, bring the nation home to its ancient seat, is Christ. Christ, therefore, is intended here, under the image of one riding through the wilderness, (‘ascendenti per

objection to this, though I prefer the translation which I have adopted. It is of less consequence how we construe the words, as the meaning of the Psalmist is obvious. The whole world was at that time filled with the vain idols of superstition, and he would assert the claim of God, and set them aside when he brought forward the God of Israel. But it is not enough that the Lord's people should bow before him with suppliant spirits. Even the wicked, while they fear and tremble before him, are forced to yield him reverence. David would have them draw near to him with cheerfulness and alacrity; and, accordingly, proceeds to insist upon his transcendent goodness shown in condescending to the *orphans* and *widows*. The incomprehensible glory of God does not induce him to remove himself to a distance from us, or prevent him from stooping to us in our lowest depths of wretchedness. There can be no doubt that orphans and widows are named to indicate in general all such as the world are disposed to overlook as unworthy of their regard. Generally we distribute our attentions where we expect some return. We give the preference to rank and splendor, and despise or neglect the poor. When it is said, *God is in the habitation of his holiness*, this may refer either to heaven or to the temple, for either sense will suit the connection. God does not dwell in heaven to indulge his own ease, but heaven is, as it were, his throne, from which he judges the world. On the other hand, the fact of his having chosen to take up his residence with men, and inviting them familiarly to himself there, is one well fitted to encourage the poor, who are cheered to think that he is not far off from them. In the next verse, other instances of the Divine goodness are mentioned — that he gives the bereaved and solitary a numerous offspring, and releases the bonds of the captive. In the last clause of the verse, he denounces the judgment of God against those who impiously despise him, and this that he might show the Lord's people the folly of envying their lot as well as strike terror into their minds. The sense of the words is, That we ought to comfort ourselves under the worst afflictions, by reflecting that we are in God's hand, who can mitigate all our griefs and remove all our burdens. The wicked, on the other hand, may congratulate themselves for a time upon their prosperity, but eventually it will fare ill with them. By *dwelling in a dry land*, is meant being banished, as it were, to a wilderness, and deprived of the benefits of that fatherly kindness which they had so criminally abused.

## Psalm 68:7-10

deserta,' *Jerome*.) not upon the heavens, at the head of the returning captives. '*His name is in Jah:*' Christ's name is in Jehovah. , 'the Name,' is used, in the Hebrew language, for the thing imperfectly apprehended, to which, however, a name belongs. Thus, for God all languages have a name; and all men have an idea of the Being intended by that name, as the First Cause, the Maker, and Governor of the universe. Yet the human intellect, — we may say, more generally, the created intellect, — comprehends not the nature of this Great Being, nor can it enumerate his attributes. 'The name of God' is the incomprehensible Being who is all that the name imports, more than is expressed; more, at least, than any name can express to the finite understanding. Thus, when we are commanded to fear the name of God, the injunction is, that we carry in our minds a constant fear of the Being to whom that name belongs. The name, therefore, of Christ is Christ himself, considered as known by a name, but yet imperfectly understood, or rather incomprehensible in his nature. The sentence, 'His name is in Jehovah,' is an emphatical assertion of his divinity, introduced here to justify and enforce the worship enjoined. 'Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: cast up a way for him that is riding through the wilderness.' Who is he that is riding through the wilderness, that we should pay him this respect? 'He,' says the Psalmist, 'who cannot be described.' 'His name is in Jah.' His name and his nature are involved in the name and nature of the Godhead. Name him: you name the All-glorious One. Name the All-glorious One: you name him. Name him as distinct from the All-Good and Glorious: you name him not aright."

7. O God! when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst march through the wilderness; Selah: 8. The earth was moved, the heavens also dropped at the presence of this God: Sinai at the presence of God, the God of Israel. <sup>16</sup> 9. Thou, O God! shalt make a liberal <sup>17</sup> rain to fall upon thine inheritance, and thou refreshest it when it is weary. 10. Thy congregation <sup>18</sup> shall dwell therein; thou, O God! wilt prepare in thy goodness for the poor.

7 *O God! when thou wentest forth before thy people, etc.* The Psalmist now proceeds to show that the Divine goodness is principally displayed in the Church, which God has selected as the great theater where his fatherly care may be manifested. What follows is evidently added with the view of leading the posterity of Abraham, as the Lord's chosen people, to apply the observations which had been just made to themselves. The deliverance from Egypt having been the chief and lasting pledge of the Divine favor, which practically ratified their adoption under the patriarch, he briefly adverts to that event. He would intimate that in that remarkable exodus, proof had been given to all succeeding ages of the love which God entertained for his Church. Why were so many miracles wrought? why were heaven and earth put into commotion? why were the mountains made to tremble? but that all might recognize the power of God as allied with the deliverance of his people. He represents God as having been their leader in conducting them forth. And this not merely in reference to their passage of the Red Sea, but their journeys so long as they wandered in the wilderness. When he speaks of the *earth being moved*, he would not seem to allude entirely to what occurred upon the promulgation of the law, but to the fact that, throughout all their progress, the course of nature was repeatedly altered, as if the very elements had trembled at the presence of the Lord. It was upon Mount Sinai, however, that God issued the chief displays of his awful power; it was there that thunders were heard in heaven, and the air was filled with lightnings; and, accordingly, it is mentioned here by name as having presented the most glorious spectacle of the Divine majesty which was ever beheld. Some read, *This Sinai*, etc., connecting the pronoun *zeh*, with the mountain here named; but it is much more emphatical to join it with the preceding clause, and to read, *the heavens dropped at the presence of This God*; David meaning to commend the excellency of the God of Israel. The expression is one frequently used by the prophets to denote that the God worshipped by the posterity of Abraham was the true God, and the religion delivered in his law no delusion, as in Isaiah 25:9, "This, this is our God, and he will save us." To establish the Lord's people in their faith, David leads them, as it were, into the very presence of God; indicates that they were left to no such vague uncertainties as the heathen; and indirectly censures the folly of the world in forsaking the knowledge of the true God, and fashioning imaginary deities of its own, of wood and stone, of gold and silver.

9. *Thou, O God! shalt make a liberal rain to fall* <sup>19</sup> *upon thine inheritance* Mention is made here of the continued course of favor which had been extended to the people from the time when

<sup>16</sup> This verse and the preceding seem to be copied from the Song of Deborah, Judges 5:4, 5.

<sup>17</sup> "C'est, par ta volonté et libéralité." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, by thy free will and liberality."

<sup>18</sup> *Thy congregations*, or *company*. This is the reading adopted also by Dathe, Berlin, and De Rossi; and it "is a much better exposition than those of the two latest English translators, Bishop Horsley and Mr Fry: —

*'Thy flocks dwell in the mansion which thou preparedst.'* — *Horsley.*

*'Thy food settled upon it.'* — *Fry.*"

*Rogers' Book of Psalms in Hebrew, etc.*, volume 2, Page 220.

<sup>19</sup> Heb. *Shall shake out*, i.e., from the clouds, *a liberal rain*.

they first entered the promised land. It is called *the inheritance of God*, as having been assigned over to his own children. Others understand by the inheritance spoken of in the verse, *the Church*, but this is not correct, for it is afterwards stated as being the place where the Church dwelt. The title is appropriately given to the land of Canaan, which God made over to them by right of inheritance. David takes notice of the fact, that, from the first settlement of the seed of Abraham in it, God had never ceased to make the kindest fatherly provision for them, sending his rain in due season to prepare their food. The words translated a *liberal rain*, read literally in the Hebrew *a rain of freenesses*, and I agree with interpreters in thinking that he alludes to the blessing as having come in the exercise of free favor,<sup>20</sup> and to God, as having of his own unprompted goodness provided for all the wants of his people. Some read *a desirable rain*; others, *a rain flowing without violence, or gentle*; but neither of these renderings seems eligible. Others read *a copious or plentiful rain*; but I have already stated what appears to me to be the preferable sense. It was a proof, then, of his Divine liberality, that God watered the land seasonably with showers. There is clearly a reference to the site of Judea, which owed its fertility to dews and the rains of heaven. In allusion to the same circumstance, he speaks of *its being refreshed when weary*. The reason is assigned — because it had been given to his chosen people to dwell in. On no other account was it blessed, than as being the habitation of God’s Church and people. The more to impress upon the minds of the Jews their obligations to Divine goodness, he represents them as *pensioners* depending upon God for their daily food. He fed them upon the finest of the wheat, giving them wine, and honey, and oil in abundance — still he proportioned the communication of his kindness so as to keep them always dependent in expectation upon himself. Some, instead of reading, *Thou wilt prepare with thy goodness, etc.*, render it, *Thou wilt prepare with rich food*; but, without absolutely objecting to this translation, I rather think that he adverts to the circumstance of God’s being led to provide for his people entirely by his own good pleasure.

### Psalm 68:11-14

**11.** The <sup>21</sup> Lord shall give the word to the women who announce the great army. **12.** Kings of armies shall flee — shall flee; and she that tarries at home shall divide the spoil. **13.** Though

<sup>20</sup> Ainsworth reads, “a rain of liberalities.” Horsley, “a shower of unmerited kindnesses;” “literally,” says he, “*a plentiful rain*, rain being used here metaphorically.”

<sup>21</sup> Dr Geddes here observes, that “the poet passes rapidly from former times to his own days, and the occasion of composing his psalm, namely, the discomfiture and flight of the combined kings of Syria, Ammon, Moab, and Edom: for with all these David had been engaged in this war.”

<sup>22</sup> The original word for “the women who announce” is *hamebassereth*. It is from *basser*, “to announce joyous tidings;” and, being a participle of the feminine gender, is very properly referred to women, who were wont to celebrate victories, or any kind of good news, with songs and music. But we find it on one occasion used to express melancholy news, (1 Samuel 4:17.) The women here are represented as announcing the victory by singing congratulatory songs. All the difficulty is, whether *hamebassereth*, be in the dative or the genitive case. If in the genitive case, then *tsaba*, which Calvin renders *army*, must, as Hammond observes, be rendered *company* — great was the company of the women who thus sang; and *host*, is often taken for the congregation or assembly employed in the service of God. But it, may also be taken in the dative, as the same critic remarks, and as Calvin here renders it. Castelleo gives a similar translation. “And thus the LXX. may be understood: Ο Θεός Κύριος δώσει ῥῆμα τοῖς εὐαγγελισαμένοις (I suppose it should be ταῖς εὐαγγελισαμαίαις) δυνάμει πολλῶ; ‘the Lord shall give the word or matter to the women that evangelise to or for the great army;’ *i e.*, which supply the office of *procones* thereto, in

you should lie among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and which behind is of the paleness of gold.<sup>23</sup> **14.** When the Almighty scattered kings in it, thou shalt make it white<sup>24</sup> in Salmon.

**11.** *The Lord shall give the word, etc.* David now adverts to the victories by which God had signally displayed his power in behalf of his people. He had himself been the instrument of restoring peace to the country, by putting down its foes, and he had extended the boundaries of the kingdom; but he ascribes the praise of all that had been done in stratagems and counsels of war to God. In representing God as issuing orders for the song of triumph, he intimates, figuratively, that it is he who determines the successful issue of battles. Notice is taken of the *women who announce the army*, for it was the custom anciently for women to sing the song of triumph, as Miriam, the sister of Moses, with her companions, sounded the praises of God upon the timbrel, and the women celebrated David's victory upon the harp, when he slew Goliath, and routed the Philistines, (Exodus 15:20; Judges 11:34; 1 Samuel 18:6.) In making this reference to a song of praise, the Psalmist, as I have already said, intended to impress the truth upon the people, that the victories gained were entirely owing to God; though, at the same time, he tacitly reminds them of its being their duty to proclaim his benefits with due gratitude.

From the verse which succeeds, we are taught that the mightiest preparations which the enemies of the Church may make for its destruction shall be overthrown. We may consider the words as spoken in the person of the Psalmist himself, or as forming the song of the women mentioned above. It was a circumstance illustrative of the Divine favor, that the most formidable kings, before whom the Jews could never have stood in their own strength, had been put to flight. That princes, who could easily have overrun the world with their forces, should have not only departed without obtaining their purpose, but been forced to fly to a distance, could be accounted for on no other supposition than God's having stood forward signally as their defender. In the Hebrew the verb is repeated, *they shall flee, they shall flee*, signifying that the attacks of the enemy had been repelled by Divine assistance once and again. The greatness of the spoil taken is intimated by the circumstance stated, that a share of it would come even to the women who remained at home. While the soldiers would return from battle clothed with the spoils, such would be the quantity of booty taken, that the females, who took no part in war, would partake of it.

**13.** *Though ye should lie among the pots*<sup>25</sup> Having spoken of God as fighting the battles of his people, he adds, by way of qualification, that they may lie for a time under darkness, though

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proclaiming their victories; though it is certain the Latin that renders it 'virtute multa,' 'by much virtue,' did not thus understand it." — *Hammond*

<sup>23</sup> "Et posteriora ejus in pallore auri." — *Lat.* In the French it is, "Et laquelle par derriere est comme fin or bien jaune;" — "and which behind is as fine yellow gold."

<sup>24</sup> "Ou, elle fust blanche." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, it was white."

<sup>25</sup> The interpretation of this verse is attended with great difficulty. Speaking of it and the following verse, Dr Lowth says, "I am not at all satisfied with any explication I have ever met with of these verses, either as to sense or construction, and I must give them up as unintelligible to me. Houbigant helps out the construction in his violent method: 'Aut invenit viam, aut facit.'" It is pretty generally admitted, that in the first part of this verse a "state of wretchedness and distress," as Calvin remarks, is indicated; but it is difficult to ascertain the meaning of the word , *shephataim*, which he renders *pots*, and, consequently, to ascertain to what the allusion particularly is. None of the old translators have so rendered it; and numerous significations have been given to it. The Chaldee renders it, "bounds in the divisions of the way;" the Syriac and Arabic, "paths" or "ways;" the Septuagint, κλήρων, "allotments," "inheritances," or "portions," apparently deriving the word from , *divisit, ordinavit*, and



eventually God will appear for their deliverance; There can be little doubt that he hints at the state of wretchedness and distress to which the nation had been reduced under the government of Saul, for the interposition was the more remarkable, considering the misery from which it had emerged.

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perhaps attaching to it a similar idea as in the preceding translations, men's portions of land or possessions having been divided and distinguished by *paths* Jerome, adhering to the Septuagint, makes it "inter medios terminos." Thus, the word will not be without significance, expressing a forlorn and wretched condition, lying down betwixt the bounds; that is, in the highways. But many modern critics think that it signifies something in relation to pots, and that it may very probably be the same as that which the Arabs call *Athaphi*, stones set in a chimney for a pot to rest on, the pots being without legs. "Of these," says Hammond, "the Arabians had three, and the third being commonly (to them in the desert) some fast piece of a rock, or the like, behind the pot, — as in a chimney the back of the chimney itself, and that not looked on as distinct from the chimney, — the other two at the sides, which were loose, might fitly be here expressed in the dual number ; and then the *lying between these* will betoken a very low, squalid condition, as in the ashes, or amidst the soot and filth of the chimney." "These two renderings," he adds, "may seem somewhat distant; and yet, considering that the *termini* or bounds in divisions of ways were but heaps of stones, or broken bricks, or rubbish, the word , which signifies these, may well signify these supporters of the pots also, in respect of the matter of these being such stones or broken bricks."

Parkhurst takes a view somewhat similar to this last interpretation. He reads, "among the fire ranges," or "rows of stones." "Those," says he, "on which the caldrons or pots were placed for boiling; somewhat like, I suppose, but of a more structure, than those which Niebuhr says are used by the wandering Arabs. 'Their fire-place is soon constructed: they only set their pots upon several separate stones, or over a hole digged in the earth.' Lying among these denotes the most abject slavery; for this seems to have been the place of rest allotted to the vilest slaves. So, old Laertes, grieving for the loss of his son, is described by Homer (in the Eleventh Book of the Odyssey) as, in the winter, sleeping where the slaves did, in the ashes near the fire: —

—Oqi dmwev eni oikw  
En koni agci purov."  
See *his Lexicon* on ii.

The Chaldee has "broken bricks," or "rubbish," that are thrown away; the word, according to this sense, being derived from *shephah*, to bruise, to trample on A similar noun, *ashpoth*, derived from the verb , is used in Psalm 113:7, for a *dunghill*, or the vilest place, whither all kinds of rubbish are cast out, and where the poor are said to lie. When Job was brought by Satan to the lowest depths of affliction, he sat down among the ashes, and scraped himself with a potsherd, which indicated the state of extreme sadness and debasement to which he was reduced. If this is the sense here, "lying among the broken bricks or rubbish" expresses, in like manner as the preceding translations, the most mean, dejected, and wretched condition.

Harmer's attempt to explain this passage is at least very ingenious: — As shepherds in the East betake themselves, during the night, for shelter to the caves which they find in their rocky hills, where they can kindle fires to warm themselves, as well as dress their provisions, and as doves, as well as other birds, frequently haunt such places, he conjectures that the afflicted state of Israel in Egypt is here compared to the condition of a dove making its abode in the hollow of a rock which had been smuted by the fires which the shepherds had made in it. He supposes the word here translated *pots* to mean the little heaps of stones on which the shepherds set their pots, there being a hollow under them to contain the fire. — *Harmer's Observations*, volume 1, pp. 176, 177.

Gesenius thinks the word is equivalent to *hammishpethaim*, which occurs in Judges 5:16, and which our English version makes "sheepfolds," the only difference between the two words being, that the word here wants the formative letter *mem* Thus, it may refer to the condition of the Israelites when living among their flocks in the wilderness. We have not yet exhausted the different significations affixed by commentators to this word; but, without referring to more, we shall only add, that, according to some, the allusion is to the condition of the Israelites in Egypt, who were doomed to the drudgery of brick-making and pottery, and had probably to sleep among the brick-kilns or earthenware manufactories in which they were employed.

With respect to the second clause of the verse, in which an image taken from the dove is introduced, a difficulty which has been stated is, how her feathers can be said to resemble yellow gold. From the circumstance, that the splendor of gold is here intermingled, Harmer concludes that this is not a description of the animal merely as adorned by the hand of nature, but that the allusion is to white doves that were consecrated to the Syrian deities, and adorned with trinkets of gold, the meaning being, "Israel is to me as a consecrated dove; and though your circumstances have made you rather appear like a poor dove, blackened by taking up its abode in a smoky hole of the rocks, yet shall you become beautiful and glorious as a Syrian silver-coloured pigeon, on which some ornament of gold is put." — *Harmer's Observations*, volume 1, p. 180. But there are certainly doves which answer to the description here given, some of them having the feathers on the sides of the neck of a shining copper color, which in a bright sun must resemble gold. See *Encyc. Brit. Art. Columbia*. Besides, the reference is not necessarily to the color of gold, but to its brilliancy. How highly poetical an emblem, to depict the glorious change effected in the condition of the Hebrews by the deliverance which God had granted them over the proud and formidable enemies who had kept them in the degrading condition represented in the first clause of the verse!

The words, however, convey a further instruction than this. They teach us the general truth, that believers are, by the hidden and mysterious power of God, preserved unhurt in the midst of their afflictions, or suddenly recovered so as to exhibit no marks of them. The language admits of being interpreted to mean either that they shine even when lying under filth and darkness, or that, when freed from their troubles, they shake off any defilement which they may have contracted. Let either sense be adopted, and it remains true that the believer is never consumed or overwhelmed by his afflictions, but comes out safe. An elegant figure is drawn from the dove, which, though it lie amongst the pots, retains the beauty which naturally belongs to it, and contracts no defilement on its wings. From this we learn that the Church does not always present a fair or peaceable aspect, but rather emerges occasionally from the darkness that envelops it, and recovers its beauty as perfectly as if it had never been subjected to calamity.

14. *When the Almighty scattered kings in it* We might read *extended*, or *divided kings*, etc., and then the allusion would be to his leading them in triumph. But the other reading is preferable, and corresponds better with what was said above of their being put to flight. There is more difficulty in the second part of the verse, some reading, *it was white in Salmon*; that is, the Church of God presented a fair and beautiful appearance. Or the verb may be viewed as in the second person — *Thou, O God! Didst make it fair and white as mount Salmon* <sup>26</sup> *with snows* The reader may adopt either construction, for the meaning is the same. It is evident that David insists still upon the figure of the whiteness of silver, which he had previously introduced. The country had, as it were, been blackened or sullied by the hostile confusions into which it was thrown, and he says that it had now recovered its fair appearance, and resembled Salmon, which is well known to have been ordinarily covered with snows. <sup>27</sup> Others think that Salmon is not the name of a place, but an appellative, meaning *a dark shade*. <sup>28</sup> I would retain the commonly received reading. At the same time, I think that there may have been an allusion to the etymology. It comes from the word *tselem*, signifying *a shade*, and mount Salmon had been so called on account of its blackness. <sup>29</sup> This makes the comparison more striking; for it intimates, that as the snows whitened this black mountain, so the country had resumed its former beauty, and put on an aspect of joy, when God dispelled the darkness which had lain upon it during the oppression of enemies. <sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Salmon is the name of a mountain in Samaria, in the tribe of Ephraim, (Judges 9:48,) white with perpetual snow.

<sup>27</sup> Carrieres, in his paraphrase, has, “You became white as snow on mount Salmon.” “We certainly think,” says the author of the Illustrated Commentary upon the Bible, “that Carrieres has seized the right idea. The intention evidently is, to describe by a figure the honor and prosperity the Hebrews acquired by the defeat of their enemies, and to express this by whiteness, and superlatively by the whiteness of snow. Nothing can be more usual in Persia, for instance, than for a person to say, under an influx of prosperity or honor, or on receiving happy intelligence, ‘My face is made white;’ or gratefully, in return for a favor or compliment, ‘You have made my face white;’ so also, ‘His face is whitened,’ expresses the sense which is entertained of the happiness or favor which has before been received. Such a figurative use of the idea of whiteness does, we imagine, furnish the best explanation of the present and some other texts of Scripture.”

<sup>28</sup> Instead of “in Salmon,” the Targum has, “in the shade of death;” and Boothroyd has,  
**“The Almighty having scattered these kings,  
 hath by this turned death-shade to splendor.”**

Walford gives a similar version, and explains the meaning to be, “Though you have been in bondage and the darkness of a dejected condition, you are now illuminated with the splendor of victory and prosperity.”

<sup>29</sup> That is, it was so called from the dark shade produced by its trees.

<sup>30</sup> “Que comme les neiges font blanchir ceste montagne, laquelle de soy est obscure et noire, ainsi quand il a pleu a Dieu d’oster l’obscurite qu’apportoit l’affliction des ennemis, lors on a veu la terre reluire d’un lustre naif, et par maniere de dire, porter une face joyeuse.” — *Fr.*

## Psalm 68:15-17

**15.** The hill of God, the hill of Bashan, a high hill, <sup>31</sup> the hill of Bashan. **16.** Why leap ye, ye high hills? the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, Jehovah will dwell in it for ever. **17.** The chariots of God are twenty thousand thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place.

**15.** *The hill of God, the hill of Bashan* Here he adverts to the spring and source of all the kindness which God had shown, this being the circumstance that he had chosen mount Zion as the place of his palace and temple, whence all blessings should go out to the nation. A Divine declaration to that effect had been made to David, and this pre-eminence and dignity conferred upon mount Zion is very properly adduced as a proof of his being king, lawfully and by Divine appointment; for there was an inseparable connection between God's dwelling upon that mountain, and David's sitting upon the throne to govern the people. The words of the verse admit of two senses. We may suppose that the mountain of God is compared to mount Bashan as being like it, or we may understand that it is opposed to it. The first is the sense adopted almost by all interpreters, that while Bashan was famed for its fertility, Zion excelled it. It is of little importance which we prefer; but perhaps the distinction would be brought out as well were we to construe the words *the hill of God* by themselves, and consider that Bashan with its boasted height is afterwards ordered to yield precedence, as if David would say, that there was but one mountain which God had consecrated to himself by an irrevocable decree, and that though Bashan was renowned for height and fertility, it must rank with other mountains, which might in vain exalt themselves to an equality with Zion, honored as the chosen residence of God. If we read the verse differently, and consider it as applying to mount Zion throughout, then the Psalmist extols it as high and illustrious, and this because there emanated from it the Divine favor, which distinguished the Jews from every other nation.

**16.** *Why leap ye, <sup>32</sup> ye high hills?* In this verse there is no obscurity or ambiguity. David having said that there was only one mountain in all the world which God had chosen, calls upon the highest hills to yield it the pre-eminency. As he repeats in the plural number what had been said immediately before of Bashan, this leads me to think that he intended first to oppose that mountain, and then all

<sup>31</sup> "La montagne des hauteurs," "the hill of highnesses or eminences." — *Fr.* That is, (says Calvin, on the margin,) "treshaute," "very high." The literal rendering of the original words is, "a hill of gibbosities," "a hill with humps," *i e.*, projections, eminences. This seems peculiarly applicable to Bashan, which had many tops; and this may explain the origin of the name of that mountain. It has its name from *tooth*; and *the mountain with teeth*, might be given to it, from the appearance of the face of it studded over with small hills. See Street, *in loco* What is here rendered "a high hill," is, in the Septuagint, rendered ὄρος τετραωμένον, and in the Vulgate, "mons coagulatus," "cheesey, full of cheeses;" or, as Hammond renders it, "a hill that yielded much butter and cheese," Bashan being a rich and fertile mountain beyond Jordan. Horsley has, "a hill of lofty brows;" and Fry, "a hill of swelling heights."

<sup>32</sup> The word here rendered *leap ye* "occurs only here," observes Hammond, "and is by guess rendered *to leap*, or *lift up*, or *exalt* one's self; but may best be interpreted, not *leap* as an expression of joy, but *lift up*, or *exalt* yourselves, as an effect of pride;" and he understands the meaning to be, Why do ye lift up or exalt yourselves, ye high hills, God not having chosen any of the highest hills to build his temple on, but the hill of Zion, of a very moderate size, lower than the hill of Hermon, and at the foot of it, (Psalm 133:3.) Some Jewish commentators, founding their opinion on the cognate Arabic word *to look after* This gives the same sense. What look ye for? what expect ye, ye high hills, to be done to you? Ye are not those which God has chosen to beautify with his glorious presence, but mount Zion is the object of his choice. Aquila and Jerome read, "Why contend ye?" Dr Chandler renders it, "Why look askance?" *i e.*, "with jealous leer malign," as Milton expresses it. "Why are ye jealous?" Horsley, following Jerome, has, "For what would ye contend?"

other high mountains generally, to Zion.<sup>33</sup> Mountains are here to be understood figuratively, and the great truth conveyed is, that the kingdom of Christ, which God had begun to shadow forth in the person of David, far excels all that is reckoned glorious by the world. The reproof which the Psalmist administers, in order to humble the proud boasting of the world, is justified by that contempt which we know that carnal and ungodly persons entertain of Christ's kingdom, devoted as they are to their own pleasures or wealth, and unable to appreciate spiritual blessings. The lesson will be felt to be the more useful and necessary, if we consider that this vain pride of man rises to an additional height, when the slightest occasion is afforded for its exercise. When we see those indulging it who have no grounds to do so, we need not wonder at the arrogance of such as are possessed of wealth and influence. But the Lord's people may afford to leave them to their self-complacency, resting satisfied with the privilege of knowing that God has chosen to take up his habitation in the midst of them. They have no reason to repine at their lot so long as they have union with God, the only and the sufficient source of their happiness.

**17. *The chariots of God are twenty thousand thousands of angels.***<sup>34</sup> For the most part, we are apt to undervalue the Divine presence, and therefore David presents us with a description fitted to exalt our thoughts of it. Owing to our unbelieving hearts, the least danger which occurs in the world weighs more with us than the power of God. We tremble under the slightest trials; for we forget or cherish low views of his omnipotence. To preserve us from this error, David directs us to the countless myriads of angels which are at his command, — a circumstance, the consideration of which may well enable us to defy the evils which beset us. *Twenty thousand* are spoken of; but it is a number designed to intimate to us that the armies of the living God, which he commissions for

<sup>33</sup> "The Psalmist," says Horsley, "having settled the Israelites between their hills, proceeds to the circumstance of God's choice of a hill for the site of his temple. He poetically imagines the different hills as all ambitious of the honor, anxiously waiting God's decision, and ready to enter into a jealous contention; *watching each other with an anxious eye*. The lofty hill of Bashan first puts in his claim, pleading his stately height —

***The hill for God is the hill of Bashan;  
A hill of lofty brows is the hill of Bashan.***

The Psalmist cuts short the contention —

***For what would ye contend, ye hills of lofty brows?  
This is the hill desired of God for himself to dwell in;  
Yea, Jehovah will dwell in it for ever.***

<sup>34</sup> The words *alpey shinan*, which Calvin renders "thousands of angels," are literally "thousands of repetition;" the noun *shanan*, being derived from *shanah*, *he repeated* or *reiterated*. Accordingly, the reading which many prefer is, "The chariots of God are twenty thousand thousands multiplied or reiterated." Hammond, who adopts this translation, observes, that "though angels are not mentioned, they are to be understood, as Jude 14, *μυριάδες ἁγία, holy myriads*." Horsley reads, "Twenty thousand thousand of thousands is the cavalry of God." "The cavalry of God," says he, "is every thing in nature which he employs as the instruments or vehicles of his power. The image, which some would introduce here of God riding in a car drawn by angels, I cannot admire; nor do I think that it is really to be found in any passage of Scripture rightly understood." But God, though not here represented as riding on a car drawn by angels, is undoubtedly, in the most magnificent style of Eastern poetry, represented as riding on his exalted car, attended by legions of angels, mounted also on cars. Comp. Deuteronomy 32:3, and 2 Kings 6:16. French and Skinner give a different view of the passage, which brings out a very good sense —

***"God hath been to them [the Israelites] twice ten thousand chariots,  
Even thousand of thousands."***

Chariots were much used in war by the nations of antiquity; and the chosen people were forbidden to use chariots and horses in war; but God was to them as effectual a safe-guard as innumerable war-chariots would have been. He was "the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof," 2 Kings 2:12. Comp. Psalm 20:7. And in *his* protection and aid they were to trust. "When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the Lord thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." "For the Lord your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies to save you," (Deuteronomy 20:1 and 4.)

our help, are innumerable; and surely this should comfort us under the deadliest afflictions of this life. In adding that *the Lord is among them*, the Psalmist is still to be considered as designing to give us an exalted view of what is included in God's presence; for the words suggest that he can no more divest himself of his existence than not have this power whereby angels are subordinated to his will. Another idea suggested is, that one God is better than a universe of angels. The great distance to which we are apt to conceive God as removed from us is one circumstance which tries our faith, and in order to obviate this, the Psalmist reminds us of *Sinai*, where there was a display of his majesty. The inference was conclusive that he still abode *in the sanctuary*. For why did God appear upon that occasion in such a glorious manner? Evidently to show that his covenant formed a sacred bond of union between him and the posterity of Abraham. Hence the words of Moses —

“Say not in thine heart, Who shall go up into heaven? or who shall descend into the deep? or who shall go over the sea? For the word is nigh unto thee,” etc. (Deuteronomy 30:12.)

Sinai accordingly is mentioned by David, to teach us that if we would fortify our minds with a firm faith in the Divine presence, we must derive it from the Law and the Prophets.

### Psalm 68:18-24

**18.** Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: <sup>35</sup> thou hast received gifts among men; <sup>36</sup> even the rebellious, that the Lord Jehovah <sup>37</sup> might dwell amongst his people. **19** Blessed be the Lord daily: this Lord will load us with deliverances. Selah. **20.** He that is our God is the God of salvations; and to the Lord Jehovah <sup>38</sup> belong the issues from death. **21.** Surely God shall wound the head of his enemies, the crown of the hair of him who walketh on in his wickedness. **22.** The Lord said, I will bring back from Bashan; I will bring again from the depths of the sea: **23.** That thy foot may be stained with blood, the tongue of thy dogs even in that of thine enemies. **24.** They have seen thy goings, O God! even the goings of my God, my King, in the sanctuary.

**18.** *Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive* There can be little doubt that these words are intended to magnify the proofs of Divine favor granted upon the elevation of David to the throne, by contrasting the state of matters with that under Saul. The *ascending on high* implies the being previously low, and intimates, that under the melancholy confusions which had prevailed in the kingdom, there was no longer the same conspicuous display of the Divine glory as formerly. The government of Saul, which, from the first, had originated in a way that was condemnable, was doomed to fall under the displeasure of God, while his favor, on the other hand, was to be restored

<sup>35</sup> “That is, a number of prisoners *captive*. See Judges 5:12; Esther 2:6; Isaiah 20:4.” — *Archbishop Secker*. See the like phrase in 2 Chronicles 28:5, 11; Numbers 21:1; Deuteronomy 21:10. “The allusion may be to public triumphs, when captives were led in chains, even kings and great men, that had captivated others.” — *Dr Gill*.

<sup>36</sup> Hebrews *baadam*, *in man*, “*in human nature*,” says Dr Adam Clarke, “and God, manifest in human flesh, dwells among mortals.” “The gifts which Jesus Christ distributes *to man* he has received *in man*, in and by virtue of his *incarnation*, and it is in consequence of his being made man that it may be said, ‘the Lord God dwells among them;’ for Jesus was called *Immanuel*, ‘God with us,’ in consequence of his incarnation.”

<sup>37</sup> The Hebrew here is not *Jehovah*, but *Jah*

<sup>38</sup> “It is worthy of remark, that whilst *Jah* occurs twenty-six times, *Jehovah* seven times, and *Jehoi* five times in this psalm, *Jah* only occurs twice.” — *Rogers’ Book of Psalms in Hebrew*, etc. volume 2, p. 221.

under David; and the undeniable appearances of this left no room for doubt that one who began his reign under such auspices was the object of the Divine choice. David, although he had acquitted himself with courage in the battles which were fought, ascribes all the glory of them to God, saying, that it was he who had taken captive the enemy, and forced them to pay tribute, and reduced the more fierce and rebellious to subjection. By the term *sorerim, rebellious, contumacious, or revolvers*, he would evidently seem to mean a distinct class of persons from the other enemies, whom he mentions as having been taken captive; and it intimates, that while those who did not venture to resist, and who surrendered, had been brought under the yoke, the more proud and unyielding had been forced into submission. The end designed by this is stated in the words which follow, *that God might dwell in the midst of his people*; and that he might demonstrate himself to be an all-sufficient protector to those who put their trust in him.

As the passage which we have now been considering is applied by Paul in a more spiritual sense to Christ, (Ephesians 4:8,) it may be necessary to show how this agrees with the meaning and scope of the Psalmist. It may be laid down as an incontrovertible truth, that David, in reigning over God's ancient people, shadowed forth the beginning of Christ's eternal kingdom. This must appear evident to every one who remembers the promise made to him of a never-failing succession, and which received its verification in the person of Christ. As God illustrated his power in David, by exalting him with the view of delivering his people, so has he magnified his name in his only begotten Son. But let us consider more particularly how the parallel holds. Christ, before he was exalted, emptied himself of his glory, having not merely assumed the form of a servant, but humbled himself to the death of the cross. To show how exactly the figure was fulfilled, Paul notices, that what David had foretold was accomplished in the person of Christ, by his being cast down to the lowest parts of the earth in the reproach and ignominy to which he was subjected, before he ascended to the right hand of his Father, (Psalm 22:7.) That in thinking upon the ascension, we might not confine our views to the body of Christ, our attention is called to the result and fruit of it, in his subjecting heaven and earth to his government. Those who were formerly his inveterate enemies he compelled to submission and made tributary — this being the effect of the word of the Gospel, to lead men to renounce their pride and their obstinacy, to bring down every high thought which exalteth itself, and reduce the senses and the affections of men to obedience unto Christ. As to the devils and reprobate men who are instigated to rebellion and revolt by obstinate malice, he holds them bound by a secret control, and prevents them from executing intended destruction. So far the parallel is complete. Nor when Paul speaks of Christ having *given gifts to men*, is there any real inconsistency with what is here stated, although he has altered the words, having followed the Greek version in accommodation to the unlearned reader.<sup>39</sup> It was not himself that God enriched with the spoils of the enemy, but his people; and neither did Christ seek or need to seek his own advancement, but made his enemies tributary, that he might adorn his Church with the spoil. From the close union subsisting between the head and members, to say that God manifest in the flesh received gifts from

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<sup>39</sup> Paul's words are not exactly those of the Septuagint, the present reading of which is, ἔλαβες δόματα ἐν ἀνθρώπῳ, "Thou hast received gifts for man;" while Paul's words are, ἔδωκε δόματα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις. But Bloomfield thinks that ἐν ἀνθρώπῳ in the Septuagint is a corruption for ἐπ' ἀνθρώποις; and that Paul read in that version ἔλαθεσ δόματα ἐπ' ἀνθρώποις, which is the true sense of the Hebrew words, being no other than this, "Thou hast received gifts on account of men;" *i. e.*, to give to men. Paul, therefore, might say ἔδωκε instead of ἔλαθεσ ἐπι, to make the sense plainer; as also does the Chaldee Paraphrast, and the Syriac and Arabic translators. Paul's words are evidently not intended to be a regular quotation, as appears from his changing the second person into the third.

the captives, is one and the same thing with saying that he distributed them to his Church. What is said in the close of the verse is no less applicable to Christ — that he obtained his victories that as God he might dwell among us. Although he departed, it was not that he might remove to a distance from us, but, as Paul says, “that he might fill all things,” (Ephesians 4:10.) By his ascension to heaven, the glory of his divinity has been only more illustriously displayed, and though no longer present with us in the flesh, our souls receive spiritual nourishment from his body and blood, and we find, notwithstanding distance of place, that his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood drink indeed.

**19. *Blessed be the Lord, etc.*** David would have us to understand, that in recounting the more particular deliverances which God had wrought, he did not mean to draw our minds away from the fact, that the Church is constantly and at all times indebted for its safety to the Divine care and protection. He adds, *Blessed be God daily* And he intimates, that deliverances might be expected from him with great abundance of every blessing. Some read, *he will load*, others, *he will carry*; <sup>40</sup> but it is of little importance which reading we adopt. He points at the fact, that God extends continued proofs of his kindness to his people, and is unwearied in renewing the instances of it. I read this *Lord* in the second part of the verse, for the letter *he*, prefixed in the Hebrew, has often the force of a demonstrative pronoun; and he would point out, as it were with the finger, that God in whom their confidence ought to be placed. So in the next verse, which may be read, this *our God is the God of salvation* What is here said coincides with the scope of what immediately precedes, and is meant to convey the truth that God protects his Church and people constantly. In saying *this God*, he administers a check to the tendency in men to have their minds diverted from the one living and true God. The salvation of God is set before the view of all men without exception, but is very properly represented here as something peculiar to the elect, that they may recognize themselves as continually indebted to his preserving care, unlike the wicked, who pervert that which might have proved life into destruction, through their unthankfulness. The Hebrew word in the 20th verse is *salvations*, in the plural number, to convince us that when death may threaten us in ever so many various forms, God can easily devise the necessary means of preservation, and that we should trust to experience the same mercy again which has been extended to us once. The latter clause of the verse bears the same meaning, where it is said, that to the Lord *belong the issues of death* Some read, the *issues unto death*, <sup>41</sup> supposing that the reference is to the ease with which God can avenge and destroy his enemies; but this appears a constrained interpretation. The more natural meaning obviously is, that God has very singular ways, unknown to us, of delivering his people from

<sup>40</sup> “The word *amas*, which we translate *to load*, signifies *to lift, bear up, support*, or, *to bear a burden for another* Hence it would not be going far from the ideal meaning to translate, ‘Blessed be the Lord, day by day, who bears our burthens for us.’” — *Dr Adam Clarke* Boothroyd, on the contrary, asserts, that “as an active verb it signifies ‘to load, to lay a burthen on another,’ but in no instance to bear or support one, 1 Kings 12:2.”

<sup>41</sup> The Septuagint has, *Τοῦ Κυρίου διέξοδοι τοῦ θανάτου*, “To the Lord belong the passages of death,” expressing the ways by which death *goes out* upon men to destroy them. The Vulgate has, “*exitus mortuus*,” “the goings out of death;” and the Chaldee Paraphrast, “From before the Lord, death, and the going out of the soul to suffocation, do contend or fight against the wicked.” Hammond follows the LXX. He observed, that the original words “must literally be rendered *goings forth to death*, and must signify the several plagues and judgments inflicted by God on impenitent enemies, the ways of punishing and destroying the Egyptians and Canaanites, drowning in the sea, killing by the sword, infesting by hornets, etc.; and these are properly to be attributed and imputed to God, as the deliverances of the Israelites, his people, in the former part of the verse; and to this sense the consequents incline, verse 21, ‘Even God shall wound.’ Horsley reads the verse,

“He that is our God is a God of salvation,

And for death are the goings forth of the Lord Jehovah;

“*i.e.*,” says he, “When Jehovah takes the field, deadly is the battle to his enemies.”

destruction.<sup>42</sup> He points at a peculiarity in the manner of the Divine deliverances, that God does not generally avert death from his people altogether, but allows them to fall in some measure under its power, and afterwards unexpectedly rescues them from it. This is a truth particularly worthy of our notice, as teaching us to beware of judging by sense in the matter of Divine deliverances. However deep we may have sunk in trouble, it becomes us to trust the power of God, who claims it as his peculiar work to open up a way where man can see none.

**21.** *Surely God shall wound, etc.* The enemies of the Church are fierce and formidable, and it is impossible that she can be preserved from their continued assaults, without a vigorous protection being extended. To persuade us that she enjoys such a defense, David represents God as armed with dreadful power for the overthrow of the ungodly. The verse stands connected as to scope with the preceding, and we might render the Hebrew particle *ach*, by *wherefore*, or *on which account*; but it seems better to consider it as expressing simple affirmation. We are to notice the circumstance, that God counts all those his enemies who unjustly persecute the righteous, and thus assures us of his being always ready to interpose for our defense. The concern he feels in our preservation is forcibly conveyed by the expressions which follow, that *he will wound the head of his enemies, and the crown of their hair*;<sup>43</sup> intimating, that he will inflict a deadly and incurable wound upon such as harass his Church. This is still more strikingly brought out in what is added immediately afterwards, when God is described as wading through destruction.

**22.** *The Lord said, I will bring back from Bashan.* That the Israelites might not be led to take an irreligious and self-glorious view of their victories; that they might look to God as the author of them; and rest assured of his protection in time to come, David sends them back to the first periods of their history, and reminds them how their fathers had been originally brought by the victorious hand of God out of the lowest depths of trouble. He would have them argue that if God rescued his people at first from giants, and from the depths of the Red Sea, it was not to be imagined that he would desert them in similar dangers, but certain that he would defend them upon every emergency which might occur. The prophets are in the constant habit, as is well known, of illustrating the mercy of God by reference to the history of Israel's redemption, that the Lord's people, by looking back to their great original deliverance, might find an argument for expecting interpositions of a future kind. To make the deeper impression, God is introduced speaking himself. In what he says he may be considered as asserting his Divine prerogative of raising the dead to life again, for his people's passage through the Red Sea, and victory over warlike giants, was a species of resurrection.

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<sup>42</sup> Agreeably to this, Hewlett observes, that the "*issues of death* mean the many providential escapes and deliverances from death;" and Boothroyd reads,

"For to Jehovah we owe our escapes from death."

The Syriac version has, —

"The Lord God is the Lord of death and of escaping."

<sup>43</sup> Bishops Hare and Horsley suppose that there is here an allusion to the usage of the people in those Arabian regions, who nourished their hair on the crown of their head, that by their unshorn heads and shaggy hair they might appear more fierce. "The expressions, 'the head,' and 'the hairy crown,'" observes Bishop Horne, "denote the principal part, the strength, the pride, and the glory of the adversary which was to be crushed;" and Roberts, in his *Oriental Illustrations*, observes, that "this language, '*wounding the crown of the hair*,' still used in the East, is equivalent to saying, 'I will kill you.'"



<sup>44</sup> Some read, *I will cause the enemy to fly from Bashan;* <sup>45</sup> but this cannot be received, and does not agree with the context, as it follows, *I will bring back from the depths of the sea* In representing God as bedewed or stained with blood, David does not ascribe to him anything like cruelty, but designs to show the Lord's people how dear and precious they are in his sight, considering the zeal which he manifests in their defense. We know that David himself was far from being a man of cruel disposition, and that he rejoiced in the destruction of the wicked from the purest and most upright motives, as affording a display of the Divine judgments. That is here ascribed to God which may be asserted equally of his Church or people, for the vengeance with which the wicked are visited is inflicted by their hands. Some read the close of the verse, *the tongue of thy dogs in thine enemies, even in him, i.e., the king and chief of them all.* This is not the meaning of the Psalmist, which simply is, that the tongues of the dogs would be red with licking blood, such would be the number of dead bodies scattered round.

**24.** *They have seen thy goings, O God!* This verse may refer to processions of a warlike kind, or to such as are made in times of peace by those who give thanks for victory. It is customary for the people of God, on occasions of the latter description, to go forth and present peace-offerings in the temple. This has led some to understand by *the goings of God,* <sup>46</sup> the crowds of his people when they proceed to the temple. But I am disposed to think that God himself is here represented as a king leading and marshalling forth his armies. Accordingly, it is added, *in the sanctuary,* under which expression there is an apt allusion to the visible symbol of the Divine presence. The great reason why God undertakes the guardianship of his people, and goes before them to repel the attacks of the enemy, is his having promised that he will hear their prayers in the sanctuary. He is therefore described as if he were seen coming out of his holy habitation, that he might conduct his people to victory. David calls him *his King,* to divert the attention of the people from himself, and lead them to view a name which belonged to a frail mortal man such as he was, in its higher application to the supreme Head of all. He speaks, it is true, in the name of the people, but not to the exclusion of himself.

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<sup>44</sup> Or, "I will bring again from Bashan," may be thus explained. I will perform for my people the like wonders which I did in the days of old; I will render them victorious over their proud enemies, as I before enabled them to triumph in the conflict with Og king of Bashan, (Deuteronomy 3:3, 4;) and I will deliver them from the greatest dangers, as I saved them from the Red Sea, by opening up a passage for them through the midst of it.

<sup>45</sup> Walford considers the persons here intended, not God's people, but their enemies. "It is evident," says he, "from the next verse, that the persons who are here meant are the enemies of God and his people; because the purpose for which they were to be brought was, that his people might completely triumph over them in their utter slaughter and destruction. These, he says, I will bring back from Bashan, and from the abysses of the sea; thus referring to the victories that had been gained over the kings of the Canaanites, and the triumph of Israel at the Red Sea. The design of this declaration is, to express the determination of God to bring forth all his enemies to destruction: be they on the heights of Bashan, or in the profoundest depths of the ocean, they shall not escape; his hand will lay hold upon them, and his power utterly destroy them. In Amos 9:2, and in Obadiah 4, there are two sublime illustrations of the sentiment that is here delivered." "Bashan was east of Judea," says Boothroyd, "and the sea in the west, so that the meaning is, that God would bring his enemies from every quarter to be slain by his people."

<sup>46</sup> "This doubtless refers to the order of the procession then on its march, and to that of religious processions in general. In the religious and festal processions of the Hindoos there is the same order and classes of performers. The singers, men and women, precede, singing songs appropriate to the occasion; and then the players on instruments follow after." — *Illustrated Commentary upon the Bible.*

## Psalm 68:25-27

**25.** The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after; in the midst were the damsels playing with timbrels. <sup>47</sup> **26.** Bless ye God in the congregations, even the Lord, O ye who are of the fountain of Israel! **27.** There is little Benjamin their ruler, the princes of Judah in their assembly, the princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali.

**25.** *The singers went before* It is evident that he does not now speak of an army in battle array, but of a solemn assembly held for offering up thanksgivings to God for victory. God had openly shown that he was their leader in war, and to him the song of triumph is with propriety addressed. Mention is made of distinct choirs employed in his service, and particularly of such as played upon the timbrel; for, absurd as the practice may appear to us, it was then customary for the women to play upon that instrument. By the fountain <sup>48</sup> from which they are called upon to bless God, some understand *the heart*, as it is known that those praises which proceed from the lips merely, and are hypocritical, meet with the Divine reprobation. But I conceive the true meaning to be, that all are summoned to praise the Lord who could deduce their origin from the patriarch Jacob. Many might not sustain the character which answered to their high vocation; but, as the whole race had been chosen of God, the Psalmist very properly invites them to engage in this devotional exercise. At the same time, I see nothing objectionable in the opinion, if any persist in preferring it, that the term is here used to distinguish the true saints of God from those who vainly boasted of being the posterity of Abraham, while they had degenerated from his spirit. Those only who walk in the footsteps of his faith are reckoned to be his children. It has caused some surprise that, in a general description of the sacred assemblies of the people, precedence should have been given to the tribe of *Benjamin* According to certain interpreters, this is owing to the position which it occupied, as being next to David; and honor is put upon the tribes of *Zebulun* and *Naphtali*, <sup>49</sup> which, though they lay at a great distance, were in a particular manner friendly and attached to him. Others think

<sup>47</sup> “The musical instrument here rendered ‘timbrels’ was a sort of small drum, carried in the hand, (Exodus 15:20,) and played on by beating with the hand or fingers, as is probable from Nahum 2:7. It was used both on civil and religious occasions; and is often mentioned, as here, to have been beaten by women, but was sometimes played on by men. It was very like, if not the same kind of instrument as the modern Syrian *diff*, which is described by Dr Russell as ‘a hoop, (sometimes with bits of brass fixed in it to make a jingling,) over which a piece of parchment is distended. It is beat with the fingers; and is the true tympanum of the ancients, as appears from its figure in several relievos representing the orgies of Bacchus, and the rites of Cybele. It is worth observing, that, according to Juvenal, the Romans had this instrument from Syria.’ Niebuhr also has given us a similar description, and a print of an instrument which, (according to his German spelling,) he says, they call *doff*: He informs us that they ‘hold it by the bottom, in the air, with one hand, while they play on it with the other.’ The Oriental *diff* appears to be very like what is known to the French and English by the name of *tambourine*.” — *Mant*.

<sup>48</sup> “A metaphor denoting the posterity of Israel, springing, as it were, from a common source or fountain.” — *Mant* Bishop Hare’s conjectural emendation gives a good sense; but it seems unnecessary. Instead of *mimmekor*, he proposes to read *mekor*; and then the passage would run thus: —

“The fount whence blessings spring to Israel’s race.”

Horsley reads, “The Lord of the stock of Israel;” and explains it of the Messiah, who was of the stock of Israel according to the flesh. Fry conceives that the reading more strictly may be, “*from the quarry of Israel*; dug, as it were, from this pit, hewn from this rock. See Isaiah 51:1.”

“They blessed Elohim in the congregations,

The Lord from the stock of Israel, (or from the quarry of Israel.)”

<sup>49</sup> Zebulun and Naphtali were in Galilee, divided from the country of the half-tribe of Manasseh; the former by the Jordan, the latter by the Lake of Gennesareth.

that the whole nation is represented under the tribes specified, which were at once the nearest and most distant.<sup>50</sup> These conjectures<sup>51</sup> are probable enough, but the point is one which may be left in uncertainty, as there may have been some other reason, which it is impossible for us to discover. It has been suggested that Benjamin is called *little* on account of the smallness of its numbers, the tribe having been nearly exterminated for the crime of the men of Gibeah, (Judges 19:20;) but David would not probably have adverted to any reproach of this kind in calling them to take so prominent a part in the praises of God.<sup>52</sup> The inspired writers, in speaking of the tribes, often allude to the patriarchs from whom they respectively took their origin; nor is it surprising that the posterity of Benjamin, who was the youngest of Jacob's children,<sup>53</sup> should receive the designation here given to them; and the truth is, that even antecedently to the heavy stroke which befell them, they were not numerous. Interpreters, by general consent, have considered that Benjamin is called *ruler*, as Saul, who was first made king in Israel, belonged to this tribe; but I cannot bring myself to think it probable that David would have made such an unseasonable allusion to Saul's memory, whose government is everywhere represented in Scripture as pregnant with disaster, and which was to be buried in that of his successor, whose reign is so prominently brought forward in this psalm. The more likely conjecture is, that this title of dignity is applied in order to put honor upon a tribe, which some might despise for its smallness, and to intimate that the Benjamites, though few in numbers, and not possessed of great influence, formed one head in Israel as well as the rest.<sup>54</sup> Others may be disposed to think that there must have been some illustrious individual in this and the two tribes mentioned along with it, or that the whole tribe had signalled itself in a recent battle. Though honorable mention is made of these tribes, yet the chief place in the numbers assembled together at this time is assigned to the princes of Judah. Some think that the copulative is understood, and read, *the princes of Judah and their congregation* The Hebrew word which we translate *congregation* is by others translated *stoning*.<sup>55</sup> But it seems preferable to construe the words as implying that this

<sup>50</sup> Why these tribes in particular? May it be, Judah (having, instead of Reuben, succeeded to the blessing which conveyed the privilege of having the Chief Ruler and Messiah of his line) and Benjamin ( ) the youngest? or Judah and Benjamin, as two of the tribes most southern and nearest to Jerusalem; and Zebulun and Naphtali, as two of the most northern and most remote? as another way of expressing 'from Dan to Beersheba,' to include them all." — *Dr Lowth*

<sup>51</sup> Of other conjectures the following are a specimen: "As for Zebulun and Naphtali, why their names are here added rather than any of the other tribes, the reason may, perhaps, best be taken from what we find prophesied of those two (Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 and Judges 5.) by Jacob and Moses and Deborah, that learning and knowledge should be most eminent in those two tribes. Of Naphtali it is said, (Genesis 49:21,) 'Naphtali is a hind let loose; he giveth goodly words;' and of Zebulun, (Judges 5:14,) 'They shall handle the pen of the writer.'" — *Hammond*. "It then specifies the tribes of Judah, Zebulun, and Naphtali, not as if they were the only tribes present, but as occupying, perhaps, the foremost ranks of the procession, and followed by all the other tribes." — *Walford*.

<sup>52</sup> "Car David appellant yci ceux qui devoient faire le plus grand devoir et estre les premiers a annoncer les louanges de Dieu, n'eust pas fait mention de ceste acte qui estoit ignominieux, et tendoit grandement a leur deshonneur." — *Fr*.

<sup>53</sup> The Septuagint has, "There is Benjamin the younger." He was the son of Jacob's old age; and to this there is an allusion in the name, which is compounded of *ben*, a son, and *yamin*, of days, (according to the Chaldee plural termination, *yin*,) intimating that he was the son of his father's old age, (Genesis 44:20.) and not, as is commonly said, *the son of my right hand* — *Bythner*

<sup>54</sup> "Caput tamen unum efficere." — *Lat*. "Font toutesfois un chef comme les autres lignees." — *Fr*.

<sup>55</sup> The word *rigmatham*, here translated *congregation* or *assembly*, signifies, according to Parkhurst, *a heap of stones for defence, a bulwark of stones*; and he considers it to be here applied metaphorically to the princes of Judah, who, so to speak, were *the bulwark* of Israel. Horsley adopts the same reading: "The princes of Judah their bulwark." Hammond, after stating that the word signifies *a stone*, observes, that it "is here used in a metaphorical sense for a *ruler* or *governor*, as a *foundation-stone* which supports the whole building may fitly be applied to a commonwealth, and then signify the prince thereof." In this sense the LXX., no doubt, understood *rigmatham*, who render it ἡγεμόνες αὐτῶν, "their governors." "It may mean," says Pike, in his Hebrew Lexicon, "their supreme authority, signified by *stoning*, a capital punishment among the Israelites, in the same

tribe presided over the assembly which marched under its auspices in war. The power of summoning the people together is thus asserted as belonging to Judah, and it is represented as honored with the government and primacy of the kingdom.

### Psalm 68:28-30

**28.** Thy God hath commanded thy strength; strengthen, O God! that which thou hast wrought in us. **29.** From thy temple upon Jerusalem kings shall bring presents unto thee. **30.** Destroy the company of spearmen, (literally, of the reed,) the multitude of bulls with the calves of the people, treading with their feet upon pieces of silver: scatter thou the people that delight in war.

**28.** *Thy God hath commanded thy strength* Men are always disposed to arrogate to themselves the glory of what they may have done instead of tracing their success to God, and David reminds the people once more that they had not triumphed by their own strength, but by power communicated from above. If they had acquitted themselves with energy on the field, he would have them consider that it was God who inspired them with this valor, and would guard them against the pride which overlooks and disparages the Divine goodness. As a consideration which might farther tend to promote humility in their minds, he adverts to the dependence in which they stood of the future continuance of the same favor and protection; this being the great cause of presumptuous confidence, that we do not feel our own helplessness, and are not led under a sense of it to resort humbly to God for the supply of our wants. Another lesson which the passage teaches us is, that more is required than that God should visit us at first with his preventing grace; that we stand constantly in need of his assistance throughout our whole lives. If this be true in the literal warfare, where our conflict is with flesh and blood, it must be still more so in matters of the soul. It is impossible that we could stand one moment in the contest with such enemies as Satan, sin, and the world, did we not receive from God the grace which secures our perseverance.

What is said of the temple in the following verse is intended to carry out the same strain of sentiment which has been already expressed. It gives the reason why God had exerted his power in behalf of the Israelites rather than others; which was, that it might be displayed as coming forth from the sanctuary and the ark of the covenant. Hence the emphasis with which David calls him in a previous part of the psalm — the God of Israel. It was not in vain that God had erected his sanctuary, or promised his presence in connection with it; and his power is here represented as issuing from the temple, to denote that the only security for his favor was to be found in his gracious covenant and promises. Some read, *From thy temple in Jerusalem* — a frigid interpretation, and one which does not express the meaning of the Psalmist. His prayer is to the effect that the Divine power might be commanded from the sanctuary upon his chosen people, here denoted by a common figure of speech by Jerusalem. It may be asked how he speaks of the temple, when it had not been yet built. The word *temple* or palace may have been used to express the tabernacle. This, at least,

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manner as it was represented among the Romans by the Fasces and Securis, the instruments of punishment carried before the Consuls." Jerome, however, has taken it for another word nearly similar to it in its letters, signifying purple, — "in purpura sua;" — but this comes to the same thing as the Septuagint translation. Dathe has "agmen," "a troop;" and according to Gesenius, it signifies "a multitude, crowd, band."

I think more probable than that he should speak of the temple by anticipation, as some suppose; and there can be no doubt that the ark had already been placed in Zion. Having already traced all the honor of the recent victories to God, he next proceeds to vindicate his claim to reap the fruits of them, by asserting that the kings who had been subdued would acknowledge God to have been their conqueror, as well as yield themselves tributary to David and his successors, — a circumstance which should lay the people of God under an additional obligation to present him with their free-will offerings of praise.

**30.** *Destroy the company of spearmen* Some read *rebuke*, but I approve of the distinction which has been noticed by those who are most skilled in the Hebrew language, that while the verb *gear*, has this meaning when the letter *beth*, is interposed, it signifies without it *to destroy*. The word, *chayath*, which I have rendered *company*, has been translated *beast*,<sup>56</sup> but no such sense can apply to it here. David evidently prays in this passage that God would deliver his chosen people by destroying their cruel and bloody enemies. In calling these *the company of the reed or cane*,<sup>57</sup> he does not mean to say that they are weak, but alludes to the kind of armor which they wore, and which were lances or spears. The reed grows in some countries to a tree, or at least has all the consistency of wood, and the people are in the habit of making darts from it. In the East missile weapons are commonly used in war. He compares them for their fierceness to *bulls*, so I have rendered the word *abbirim*; for though it may be translated *strong* or *stout* persons — *the congregation of the strong* — it occasionally bears the other meaning; and as David adds, *calves of the people*,<sup>58</sup> it would seem evident that he uses a figure to represent the rage and fury of the enemy, and perhaps their strength, which the Israelites were wholly unequal to combat except with Divine assistance. It is not so easy to discover the meaning of the next clause in the verse, *treading upon pieces of silver* The Hebrew verb *raphas*, signifies *to tread*, or literally, (for it is here in the *hithpael* conjugations) *causing themselves to tread*; and some consider that the allusion is to

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<sup>56</sup> Instead of *the company of spearmen*, the greater number of modern critics consider *the wild beast of the reeds* as the most correct translation; and this is understood by many to represent the Egyptian people and government under the emblem of the hippopotamus or river-horse, the behemoth of Scripture. This animal — which is a quadruped of enormous size, of prodigious strength, fierce and cruel in its disposition, and whose skin is so impenetrable that no arrows can pierce it — shelters and reposes itself among the tall reeds which skirt in abundance the banks of the Nile. (Job 40:21.) It is a very appropriate emblem of the Egyptian power, in the height of its greatness so formidable, and the inveterate enemy of Israel. And that the Psalmist here refers to it has been thought the more probable, from his mentioning, in the clause immediately following, the bulls and calves of the people, these animals having been honored and worshipped as deities by that degenerate and superstitious nation. Or, the *wild beast of the reeds* may, as is supposed by others, denote the same power under the representation of the crocodile, to which the characteristics of the hippopotamus, now specified, are equally applicable. By this ferocious and truculent animal Pharaoh king of Egypt is represented in Ezekiel 29:3, 5, and 32:2; and in Psalm 74:14. This, it would appear, was anciently employed as an emblem of Egypt. On a medal which the Emperor Augustine caused to be struck after he had completely reduced this powerful kingdom, Egypt is represented by the figure of a crocodile bound with a chain to a palm-tree, with the inscription, *Nemo antea relegavit*. Dathe, however, rejects the opinion, that the crocodile, and under it the King of Egypt, is pointed at; and observes, that David cultivated peace with the King of Egypt, and that, in verse 31st, the Egyptians are commemorated as worshippers of the true God. He supposes that *the wild beast of the reeds* may be an epithet applied to the lion, who is accustomed to haunt places where reeds grow, and that under this image the King of Syria may be referred to, with whom David carried on lengthened and bloody wars, as is abundantly evident from sacred history. Dr Lowth also supposes that *the lion* is meant, (see his *Lectures on Sacred Poetry*, volume 1, p. 135;) and the same view is adopted by Schnurrer, Rosenmuller, and others.

<sup>57</sup> The original term is *kane*; hence the English word *cane*

<sup>58</sup> While by *the multitude of bulls* some understand powerful leaders, by *the calves of the people* they understand the mass of the people, undistinguished for rank or power, and particularly the young men. But others, as Bishop Horne, suppose, that by *the calves of the people* is meant the idol-calves of the Egyptians, their Apis, Osiris, etc., whom they made the objects of their religious worship. Horsley reads, “The assembly of those who place their strength in the calves;” that is, as he explains it, “The people of Egypt, who worshipped calves, and trusted in them as their gods.”

the arrogance and vain-glorious boasting of the enemy. Others attach exactly the opposite sense to the words, holding that they denote submission, and that the enemy would bring pieces of silver in token of subjection.<sup>59</sup> But how could we suppose that David would pray for the destruction of enemies who were already subdued, and paying tribute in the character of suppliants? To this it has been said in reply, that enemies may retain their animosity in all its force within their own breasts, ready to vent itself in rebellion upon the first opportunity, although when deprived of arms they cannot display it openly, and that this is especially true of the enemies of the Church, whose antipathies are virulent, ever breaking forth afresh so soon as an occasion offers. But I see no necessity for doing violence to the words of the Psalmist, and would take them in their plain acceptation, as meaning that the enemy in their pride trampled upon pieces of silver. The reference may be to attachments of silver upon their sandals, as the Eastern nations were always proverbial for their luxury.<sup>60</sup> What immediately follows by no means favors the sense we have formerly adverted to, *scatter the people who delight in war*, where he hints that they sought groundless occasions for quarrel and tumult, and gratuitously attacked such as were disposed for peace. When we find David, after all the victories he had gained, still commending himself and his people to the protection of God, it should teach us to abandon the hope of ever seeing the Church placed in a state of perfect tranquillity in this world, exposed, as it is, to a succession of enemies raised up by the malice of Satan, and designed by God for the trial and exercise of our patience. In comparing their enemies to the beasts here mentioned, and taking notice that they delighted in war, it was no

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<sup>59</sup> In Bagster's interlinear version, the rendering is, "shall be each submitting itself with pieces of silver." Wheatland and Silvester translate,

"Till each submit, from hostile acts shall cease,  
And with the tribute-silver sue for peace."

<sup>60</sup> Various other explanations have been given of the words, - , *mithrappes beratsey-kaseph*, rendered by Calvin, *treading with their feet upon pieces of silver*, and by which critics have been much perplexed. "Berlin translates the words 'calcantem frustra argenti,' which he explains by 'pavimentum argento tessellatum.' De Rossi explains the words thus, 'Who advance with laminae of silver under their horses' hoofs.' Immanuel Ben Solomon, whose *Scholia* on select passages of the Psalms were published by De Rossi, gives the following explanation. 'Dicit [vates scil.] quod Deus disperdit nationes, quae volunt malum inferre Israeli, et coetum taurorum, seu reges illustriores, ut reges Assyriae et Babylonis, quorum quisque conculcat frustra argentea; i. e., incedunt cum lamina aurea sub pedibus suis ob multitudinem divitiarum suarum.'" — *Rogers' Book of Psalms*, volume 2, p. 223. Dr Geddes' version is:

"The assemblage of the potent lords of nations,  
Who tread on tiles of silver;"

and he supposes that the poet alludes to the floors in the palaces of the Oriental kings, which were paved with silver. Dr Jubb renders the phrase, "who excite themselves with fragments of silver;" and considers the allusion to be to the dancing of the Egyptians before their idol-calves, with the tinkling instruments called *Sistra*. That they were accustomed to dance before these idols is evident from Exodus 32:6, where we are taught that the people of Israel, in imitation of the Egyptian idolatry, rose up to shout and dance before the golden calf; for such is the meaning of the words, "they rose up to play," as appears from verses 17, 18, and 19. And that they used the *sistrum* in religious feasts, Herodotus informs us in the second book of his History. The words, *pieces of silver*, according to Jubb, signify the little loose pieces of metal with which the *sistrum* was hung round, which produced the jingling noise when the instrument was played upon. This description fits the Egyptians; and that it really belongs to them may be inferred, with some degree of probability, from the following verse, where it is said, "Princes shall come out of Egypt," as if the subjugation of this nation, imprecated in the preceding verse, were here supposed complete. Tucker has here a very good remark. "David," says he, "invokes the Messiah to bring down the power of Egypt; but in his abhorrence of their idolatry, deigns not to designate them except in the most contemptuous terms. He says not, Rebuke the assembly of those who worship bulls and calves, and dance round altars to the sound of instruments of silver, but he classes the people on a par with the idols which they worshipped, — 'the assembly of bulls and calves, who dance to bits (or pieces) of silver.'" "The *sistrum* was of an oval figure, or a dilated semicircle, in the shape of a shoulder-belt, with brass wires across, which played in holes wherein they were stopped by their flat heads. The performer played on it by shaking the *sistrum* in cadence, and thereby the brass wires made a shrill and loud noise." — *Mant*.

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doubt his intention to influence the minds of the people of God to the contrary dispositions of clemency and mercy, as being that frame of spirit in the exercise of which they might expect to receive the Divine assistance. The more violently their enemies raged, and the more lawless their attempts might prove, they had only the more reason to expect the interposition of God, who humbles the proud and the mighty ones of this world. Such being the character of God, let us learn from this prayer of David to resort to him with confidence when the objects at any time of unmerited persecution, and to believe that he is able to deliver us at once from all our enemies.

### Psalm 68:31-35

**31.** Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out [or, shall hasten to stretch out] her hands unto God. **32.** Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth: sing praises to the Lord. Selah. **33.** To him that rideth upon the heaven of heavens, which were of old, [literally the heavens of ancientness;] lo! he shall send forth in his voice a mighty voice. **34.** Give strength unto God over Israel; his excellency and his strength are in the clouds. **35.** O God! thou art terrible out of thy holy places: the God of Israel himself shall give strength and power unto his people. Blessed be God!

**31.** *Princes shall come out of Egypt.* He resumes the strain of thanksgiving, and confirms what he had previously asserted, that kings would come and pay tribute unto God. The examples which he brings forward are those of the Egyptians and Ethiopians. This sufficiently proves that the prediction must be extended to Christ, by whom the Egyptians and Ethiopians were brought under the sway of God. The word *tarits*, translated, *shall soon stretch out*, might have been rendered, *shall cause to run*.<sup>61</sup> But it seemed necessary to soften the harshness of the figure. It is doubtful whether the allusion be to the promptness with which they should yield subjection, or whether he means that they would stretch out their hands to entreat pardon, this being an attitude common to suppliants. According to either interpretation, it is their submission which is intended, and it is enough to know that David asserts that Ethiopia and Egypt would come under the power of God, and not they only, but the most distant parts of the world.

In the next verse he goes farther than before, and calls upon *the kingdoms of the earth to praise God*, language which implies that those who had once been distinguished by their hostility to him would be ranked amongst his willing worshippers. There must be the knowledge of God, as I have remarked elsewhere, before men can celebrate the praises of his name; and we have a proof of the calling of the Gentiles, in the fact that Moses and the prophets invite them to offer sacrifices of praise. That it might not seem a strange and incredible thing to speak of the extension of the worship of God from one land, within which it had been hitherto confined, to the whole world, David insists upon God's rightful dominion over all parts of the earth. *He rideth upon the heaven of heavens*; that is, as we have observed at the beginning of the psalm, he has supreme power over all creatures, and governs the universe at his will. This truth is one which, even in its general application, is well

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<sup>61</sup> "The Hebrew is very emphatic: — 'Cush will cause her hands to run out to God.' She will with great *alacrity* and delight surrender her *power* and *influence* unto God." — *Dr Adam Clarke*.

fitted to beget a reverential consideration of the majesty of God; but we must not overlook the more particular reason for which it is here introduced. Mention having been made of the Gentiles, who lay as yet without the pale of the Church, he proves them to be embraced in the government of God by virtue of his sovereignty as Creator, and intimates that there was nothing wonderful in the fact, that he who sits upon the heavens should comprehend the whole inhabitants of the earth under his sway. By the *heavens of ancient times*, it is meant to intimate that the whole human family were under his power from the very beginning. We have a signal proof of the glorious power of God in the fact, that, notwithstanding the immensity of the fabric of the heavens, the rapidity of their motion, and the conflicting revolutions which take place in them, the most perfect subordination and harmony are preserved; and that this fair and beautiful order has been uninterruptedly maintained for ages. It is apparent then how the ancientness of the heavens may commend to us the singular excellency of the handiwork of God. Having touched upon the work of creation, he particularises *thunder*, for this is what he intends by *a mighty voice*, as in Psalm 29:4. There are two constructions which we may put upon the words used, either that by his voice of command he calls forth the thunders which shake heaven and earth with the loudness of their sound, or that he sends forth his mighty voice in the thunder. I have already shown, at some length, in commenting upon the other passage just quoted, that there is a propriety in God's being represented as *thundering*; for the phenomenon is one which, more than any other, impresses an awe upon the spirits of men. And the words are introduced with the exclamation *lo!* or *behold!* the better to arrest our wandering thoughts, or rather to reprehend our security.

**34.** *Give strength unto God over Israel* The expression is in allusion to the sentence which went before, and in which God was said to send forth a strong or mighty voice. Not that, properly speaking, we can give anything to Him, but, disposed as we are to withhold that honor which is his due, David subjoins to what he had said of his thundering with a mighty voice, an injunction that we should, on our part, be ready to sound forth his praises. To guard the Gentile nations against those false ideas upon religion in which they were accustomed to indulge, he brings them back to the doctrine of the Law, in which God had specially revealed himself, and intimates that, if they would not lose themselves in error, they must advance by necessary steps from the creation and government of the world, to that doctrine in which God had condescended to make a familiar revelation of himself to men. So much is included when God is spoken of here as *the God of Israel* But he does not satisfy himself with enjoining them to celebrate the power of God with praises of the voice. He exhorts them to the exercise of faith, for in reality we cannot better ascribe strength unto God, than by reposing in his protection as all-sufficient. Thus, after having said that *his strength is in the clouds*; <sup>62</sup> he adds, that *he is terrible out of his holy places*, by which is meant, that he exerts a power in his temple which is sufficient to confound his enemies. Some understand heaven and earth to be the *holy places* intended, but this does not agree with the context, for it is immediately added, that *the God of Israel* would give strength unto his people. It is evident, therefore, that the Psalmist speaks of God's protection of his Church. The plural number is used in speaking of the sanctuary, here as in other places, because the tabernacle was divided into three parts. He points, in short, to

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<sup>62</sup> “This refers to the phenomena of thunder and lightning; for all nations have observed that the electric fluid is an irresistible agent — destroying life, tearing towers and castles to pieces, rending the strongest oaks, and cleaving the most solid rocks; and the most enlightened nations have justly considered it as an especial manifestation of the power and Sovereignty of God.” — *Greenfield*.



the ark of the covenant, as that which the believing people of God should recognize as a symbol of confidence, remembering the promise, "I will dwell in the midst of you," and thus resting with security under the wings of the Divine protection, and confidently calling upon his name. Any right which Israel might have in distinction from others to trust in the guardianship of God, rested entirely upon that covenant of free grace by which they had been chosen to be God's peculiar heritage. Let it be remembered, however, that God continues to exert in behalf of his Church still these terrible displays of his power of which the Psalmist speaks.

## PSALM 69

There is a close resemblance between this psalm and the twenty-second. In the opening verses, David complains of the barbarous cruelty of his enemies, and of the grievous wrongs which they had inflicted upon him.<sup>63</sup> But his mind, he affirms, was not hereby reduced to such a state of distress as to prevent him from patiently relying on the protection of God, or to discourage him from continuing in the undeviating course of a holy and an upright life. He rather testifies that his piety, and the courage and activity which he had manifested in maintaining the interests of the divine glory, were the cause of the hostility borne to him by the generality of men. After having again complained of being not less shamefully than cruelly oppressed by his enemies, he invokes God to visit them with deserved punishment. In the close, exulting as if he had obtained his highest wishes, he engages to yield to God a solemn sacrifice of praise.

### *To the chief musician upon Shoshannim of David.*

We have already spoken elsewhere of the word *Shoshannim*. Its proper meaning is uncertain and obscure; but the most probable conjecture is, that it was the commencement of some song. If, however, any would prefer considering it as the name of some musical instrument, I have no objections. But the opinion held by some that this psalm was composed at the season of spring, when the lilies begin to blossom, is altogether unfounded and frivolous.<sup>64</sup> Before proceeding farther, we would have you to observe that David wrote this inspired ode not so much in his own name, as in the name of the whole Church, of whose Head he was an eminent type, as will be more dearly brought out in the sequel. This is highly worthy of our notice, that from this consideration we may be led to contemplate with the greater attention the representation which is here given of the common condition of all the people of God. Besides, it is highly probable that David did not here comprehend only one kind of persecution, but all the evils which he had suffered during the course of many years.

### **Psalm 69:1-5**

**1.** Save me, O God! for the waters have entered in unto my soul. **2.** I am sunk in deep mire, where there is no footing, [or standing place:] I am come into deep waters, and the flood<sup>65</sup> of the water overfloweth me. **3.** I am weary of crying; my throat has become hoarse therewith: my eyes have failed with [or in] waiting for my God. **4.** They who hate me without cause are more in number than the hairs of my head: my lying adversaries, who eagerly desire to destroy me, are increased;

<sup>63</sup> The particular enemies of whom he speaks are uncertain; some referring the occasion of the composition of the psalm to his persecution by Saul, and others to the rebellion of Absalom. But to whatever part of David's eventful life the psalm primarily refers, it may be concluded, from the frequency with which it is quoted and applied to Christ in the New Testament, that it was prophetic of him, of whom David, rejected and persecuted, was an eminent type. It is quoted in the New Testament at least seven times; the 4th verse in John 15:25; the 9th verse in John 2:17, and Romans 15:3; the 21st verse in Matthew 27:34, 48, and John 19:28, 29; the 22d and 23d verses in Romans 11:9, 10; and the 25th verse in Acts 1:16, 20.

<sup>64</sup> They rest this opinion upon the meaning which they attach to the word *Shoshannim*, in the title of the psalm, which they translate *lilies*

<sup>65</sup> "Ou, la force et le fil." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, the force and course."

<sup>66</sup> that which I took not by spoil, then <sup>67</sup> I restored it. **5.** O God! thou knowest my foolishness; and my faults are not hidden from thee.

**1.** *Save me, O God! for the waters, etc.* Under the figure of *waters*, the Psalmist represents his condition as so extremely distressing that it brought him even to the brink of despair; and yet we know that, so far from being a soft and an effeminate person, he was one who encountered and overcame dreadful temptations with extraordinary courage. Whence we may infer the bitterness of the distress with which he was at that time afflicted. Some understand the word *soul* as denoting *life*; <sup>68</sup> but this gives a very cold and unsatisfactory meaning. It rather signifies *the heart*. A man when he falls into an abyss of waters, may prevent for some time the water from entering his body, by stopping his mouth and his nostrils, but at length, from its being impossible for a human being to live without respiration, suffocation will compel him to let in the waters, and they will penetrate even to the heart. David by this metaphor would intimate, not only that the waters had covered and overwhelmed him, but also that he had been forced to draw them into his body.

**2.** *I am sunk in deep mire, where there is no standing place* Here he compares his afflictions to a deep sink of mire, where there is still greater danger; for if a man fixes his feet upon a solid bottom, he may raise himself up, there having been many instances in which persons, placing their feet on the bottom, have by a sudden spring emerged and escaped the peril of the waters; but when a man finds himself once sunk in some slough or muddy river, it is all over with him, he has no means of saving himself. <sup>69</sup> The Psalmist adduces additional circumstances in illustration of his afflicted condition. He declares that *he was inundated by the flowing of the waters*; an expression indicating the disorder and confusion which his distresses and persecutions produced.

**3** *I am weary of crying* David, in seeking and calling upon God, when his affairs were in such a confused and desperate condition, exhibited an instance of rare and wonderful patience. He complains of having continued crying until he was exhausted and became hoarse, and all to no purpose. By the word *weary*, he does not mean that he gave up with prayer, as if he had cast from him all love to and delight in that exercise upon finding that it proved unavailing as a means of deliverance. He rather describes his untiring perseverance; and the same idea is expressed by his *hoarse throat* and *failing eyes*. <sup>70</sup> He certainly did not cry out before men from mere affectation, nor was this hoarseness contracted in the course of one day. We perceive, then, that although his bodily senses failed him, the vigor of his faith was by no means extinguished. When we reflect that David has spoken, as it were, out of the mouth of Christ, and, as it were, out of the mouth of all true saints who are the members of Christ, we ought not to think that any strange thing happens to us, if at any time we are so overwhelmed with death, as to be unable to discern the slightest hope

<sup>66</sup> “Ou, fortifiez.” — *Fr. marg.* “Or, strengthened.”

<sup>67</sup> The Hebrew word , for *then*, appears to be emphatic. “ ; *in ipso articulo*, (Schultens in Proverbs 7:22;) immediately, without any contention, or delay.” Lowth, quoted in Merrick’s Annotations.

<sup>68</sup> “*The waters are come in unto my soul; i.e., a flood of overwhelming calamities threaten my life: comp. verse 16.*” — *Cresswell*. Williams thinks the allusion is to a leaky vessel, or to an inundation.

<sup>69</sup> “Comme nous en voyons plusieurs qui donnans du pied au fond, de roideur trouvent facon d’eschapper le peril de l’eau: mais depuis qu’on se trouve une fois enfonce en quelque bourbier ou riviere limonneuse, c’est fait, il n’y a nul moyen de se sauver.” — *Fr.*

<sup>70</sup> “‘*My sight faileth me,*’ etc. This is said metaphorically, the metaphor being taken from the pain occasioned to the eyes when they are long and intently fixed upon the same point.” — *Cresswell*

of life. Yea, rather let us learn betimes, while God spares us, to meditate on this truth, and derive the aid which it is fitted to impart under calamity, that even in the most profound depths of adversity faith may hold us up, and, what is more, may elevate us to God; there being, as Paul testifies, (Romans 8:39) no height nor depth which can separate us from the infinite love of Him who swallows up all depths, yea, even hell itself.

4. *They who hate me without cause are more in number than the hairs of my head* The Psalmist now expresses without figure what he had said under the metaphors of the mire and of the impetuous rushing of the waters. Persecuted as he was by so great a multitude of enemies, he had too good reason to be afraid of death in innumerable ways. Nor is his language hyperbolic, when he represents his enemies as *more in number than the hairs of his head*, since he was mortally hated and detested by the whole kingdom, it being the universal belief that he was a base and wicked traitor to his country. Farther, we know from the sacred history how numerous and powerful the armies were which Saul sent forth to pursue him. He expresses the mortal hatred which they bore to him, when he tells us that they were intently set upon his destruction, being eagerly desirous to have him cut off by a violent death; and yet he avows that he had done nothing to merit such unrelenting persecution. The Hebrew word , *chinnam*, which we have rendered, *without cause*, and which some translate, *for nothing*, intimates that they were impelled by a strong desire to do him injury, although he had not done them even the slightest wrong, nor given them the smallest provocation by ill usage of any kind. For this reason he applies to his enemies the appellation , *sheker*, that is, *liars*, because they had no just ground to make war upon him, although they pretended the contrary. Let us, therefore, after his example, if at any time we are subjected to persecution, study to have the support arising from the testimony of a good conscience, and to be able freely to protest before God, that the hatred which our enemies cherish against us is altogether causeless. This implies a self-control to which it is very difficult for a man to inure himself; but the more difficult it is, the more strenuous ought to be his efforts to attain it. It is mere effeminacy to regard it as an intolerable evil to be unrighteously afflicted; and the folly of this is very happily exposed by that noble answer of Socrates to his wife, who, having one day lamented, in prison, that he was condemned wrongfully, received from him this reply, “What then — would you rather that I should have suffered death for my offenses?” Farther, David adds, that he not only had to suffer the wrongs of violence, but had also to bear much reviling and contumely, as if he had been convicted of many crimes; a trial which, to an ingenuous mind, is more bitter and hard to bear than a hundred deaths. Many are to be found resolutely prepared to encounter death, who are by no means prepared to exhibit equal fortitude in the endurance of shame. Farther, David was not only despoiled of his goods by the violence of robbers, but he had been also mangled in his person, as if he had been a thief and a robber: *That which I took not by spoil, then I restored it* <sup>71</sup> When his enemies thus plundered and maltreated him, they doubtless boasted that they were acting as the judges of a

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<sup>71</sup> “There is an apparent impropriety in the language of this verse, though the sense is perfectly clear. It is a proverbial expression, to mark the injustice and extortion of the enemies that are referred to, who compelled the speaker, without any right, to yield up his goods to persons to whom he was not indebted.” — *Walford*. Horsley observes, that this last clause is a proverbial expression, the meaning of which is, “I have been accountable for the crimes of others.” Dr Adam Clarke also remarks, that this is a sort of proverbial expression like these: “Those who suffered the wrong pay the costs” — “Kings sin and the people are punished.” This pre-eminently applies to Christ, who was perfectly holy, but who, by bearing the punishment due to the guilt of man, made satisfaction to Divine justice for sins which he never committed, and restored those blessings which he never took away.

perverse and wicked man; and we know that they were held in honorable estimation as judges. Let us therefore learn from this example to prepare ourselves not only to bear patiently all losses and troubles, yea, even death itself; but also shame and reproach, if at any time we are loaded with unfounded accusations. Christ himself, the fountain of all righteousness and holiness, was not exempted from foul calumny, why then should we be dismayed when we meet with a similar trial? It may well fortify our minds against it when we consider, that to persevere steadfastly in the practice of righteousness, although such is the reward which we receive from the world, is the genuine test of our integrity.

5. *O God! thou knowest my foolishness* Augustine has labored to little purpose to show in what way these words are applicable to Christ; and at length he transfers to his members that which could not properly be said of the Head.<sup>72</sup> David here uses the language of irony; and by this mode of expressing himself he meant to intimate, that, overwhelmed with the unrighteous judgments of men, he betakes himself to God, and implores him to appear as the defender of his cause. This is much more emphatic than if he had affirmed plainly, and without figure, that his integrity was known to God. In this way he administers a sharp rebuke to his enemies, and as it were looks down with a noble contempt upon the calumnious speeches which they uttered against him; as Jeremiah does when he says,

“O Lord! thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived.”

(Psalm 20:7)

Some ignorant people put a violent construction on these words of Jeremiah, as if they implied that he was actually deceived; whereas he is rather to be understood as deriding with bitter sarcasm his calumniators, who, in speaking evil of him, were chargeable with reproaching and blaspheming God himself. David in like manner, in the passage before us, as a means of preserving himself from succumbing under the perverse judgments of men, appeals to God as the judge of his cause; and

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<sup>72</sup> According to Augustine, the Messiah, when he says “my foolishness” and “my iniquities,” speaks of the sins of men which were imputed to him, and for which he suffered and died under the curse of the law, which treated him as if he had been a sinner, in consequence of the sins thus imputed to him. A similar interpretation is given by Bishops Horsley and Horne, as well as many others. “The Messiah,” says the first of these critics, “here, as in many places, may speak of the follies and crimes of men, for which he had made himself answerable as his own.” Admitting, as we are disposed to do, although Calvin takes an opposite view, that the passage is applicable to Christ, it may be doubted whether this is the correct interpretation. The sins of those for whom Christ died, by being imputed to him, no doubt became his in the eye of the law, in such a sense as to make him answerable for them. But the Scriptures, be it observed, while they speak of him as “wounded for *our* transgressions, and bruised for *our* iniquities,” and as “bearing *our* sins in his own body on the tree,” as if afraid to use any forms of expression which would even seem to derogate from his immaculate purity, never speak of the sins of those for whom he died as his *own* sins. What Horsley adds, as an additional explanation, is very unguarded. “Perhaps,” says he, “He who, although he was without sin, was yet tempted in all points like up to us, might, in his humility, speak of the *incitement of the passions in his own mind as weakness and fault*, making confession of it before the Father.” Nothing, doubtless, was farther from the mind of the prelate than to teach any thing inconsistent with the perfect holiness of the Son of God; and he expressly warns that “he was without sin;” but the language which he employs is scarcely consistent with this position, and it can convey no idea on the subject except an erroneous one. “The prince of this world cometh,” said Jesus to his disciples, “and hath nothing in me” — *hath nothing in me*, that is, to use the words of Dr Doddridge, “no guilt of mine to give him power over me; nor any inward corruption, to take part with his temptations.” The explanation of the text, which appears to be the most natural and consistent, is that which considers the Savior as solemnly appealing to the Father in vindication of his innocence. His enemies falsely charged him with crimes, and made these charges the ground of their cruel and malignant proceedings against him. The Divine Sufferer, therefore, with confidence appeals to God, saying, Thou, who art the omniscient and all-righteous Judge, knowest that I am innocent of the crimes laid to my charge, and I invoke thee to plead my cause. This interpretation, which is adopted by many eminent critics, as Dr Boothroyd, Dr Morrison, Walford, and others, is strongly supported by the context. The preceding verse contains strong assertions of his innocence; and it was very natural to accompany these with an appeal from the falsehood and calumny of men, to the all-seeing and righteous Judge of the universe.

possessing as he did the approving testimony of a good conscience, he regards in a great measure with indifference the unjust estimate which men might form of his character. It were indeed desirable that our integrity should also be acknowledged and approved of by men, and that not so much on our own account as for the edification of our brethren. But if, after we have done all in our power to make men form a favorable opinion respecting us, they misconstrue and pervert every good word which we utter, and every good action which we perform, we ought to maintain such greatness of mind as boldly to despise the world and all false accusers, resting contented with the judgment of God and with that alone; for those who are over anxious about maintaining their good name cannot but often experience fainting of heart. Let us be always ready to satisfy men; but if they refuse to listen to what we have to say in self-vindication, let us proceed in our course through evil report as well as good report, following the example of Paul where he fearlessly appeals to the judgment of God,

“who will bring to light the hidden things of dark,”

(1 Corinthians 4:5)

### Psalm 69:6-9

**6.** O Jehovah, Lord of Hosts! let not them that wait for thee be ashamed in me: let not them who seek thee be put to shame in me, O God of Israel! **7.** For on thy account I have suffered reproach: shame hath covered my face. **8.** I have been a stranger to my brethren, and am become an alien to the children of my mother. <sup>73</sup> **9.** For the zeal of thy house hath eaten me up; and the reproach of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.

**6** *O Jehovah, Lord of Hosts! let not them that wait for thee be ashamed in me.* David declares that he is set forth as an example from which all the people of God may derive matter either of hope or despair. Although he was held in detestation and execrated by the great body of the people, there yet remained a few who were ready to bear just and impartial testimony to his innocence; knowing as they did that he was unrighteously afflicted by his persecutors, that he constantly reposed on the grace and goodness of God, and that no temptations could discourage or prevent him from continuing steadfast in the practice of true godliness. But when they observed the distresses and calamities to which he was notwithstanding subjected, the only conclusion to which they were able to arrive was, that all the pains and labor which he had taken in devoutly serving God were entirely thrown away. As all the instances in which God extends his succor to his servants are so many seals, by which he confirms and gives us assurance of his goodness and grace towards us, the faithful must have been exceedingly discouraged had David been forsaken in the extremity of his

<sup>73</sup> In the East, where polygamy prevails, those who are children of the same father, but by different mothers, scarcely look upon each other as brothers and sisters at all, but as strangers or enemies; while those who are children of the same mother regard each other with peculiarly strong affection. Hence said Gibeon to Zebah and Zalmunna, who had put to death his brethren, “They were my brethren, even the sons of my mother; as the Lord liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you.” (Judges 8:19.) It therefore greatly aggravated the affliction of David that he had “become an alien to the children of his mother,” from whom he might have expected affection and sympathy, however much he might have been disregarded by his brethren, who were the children of his father’s other wives. See volume 2, p. 277, note 3.

distress. The danger of their being thus discouraged he now lays before God; not that God has ever need of being put in mind of any thing, but because he allows us to deal familiarly with him at the throne of grace. The word *wait* is properly to be understood of hope, and the expression *to seek God*, of prayer. The connecting of the two together teaches us the profitable lesson, that faith is not all inactive principle, since it is the means of stirring us up to seek God.

**7** *For on thy account I have suffered reproach* He now expresses more distinctly what he had stated ironically in the fifth verse, where he asserts that his faults were not hidden from God. Nay, he proceeds farther, declaring not only that the evil treatment which he met with from his enemies was unjust and altogether unmerited, but also that his cause was really God's cause, since whatever he had undertaken and engaged in was expressly in obedience to the command of God. Saul no doubt had other reasons, or at least other pretences, for persecuting David; but as the hatred which he entertained against him most unquestionably proceeded from God's having called and anointed him to be king, David here justly protests that it was not for any wickedness which he had committed, but because he had obeyed God, that men in general disapproved of and rashly condemned him. It is a source of great consolation to true believers when they can protest that they have the warrant and call of God for whatever they undertake or engage in. If we are hated by the world for making a public confession of the faith, a thing which we are to expect, it being evident from observation that the wicked ordinarily are never more fierce than when they assault the truth of God and the true religion, we have ground to entertain double confidence.<sup>74</sup> We also learn from this passage how monstrous is the malice of men, who convert into a ground for reproach and reprehension the zeal for the Divine glory by which true believers are animated.<sup>75</sup> But it is well for us that God not only wipes away the reproaches with which the wicked load us, but also so ennobles them, that they surpass all the honors and triumphs of the world. The Psalmist farther aggravates his complaint by the additional circumstance, that he was cruelly cast off by his own relations and friends; from which we are taught, that when by our devotedness to the cause of religion we cannot avoid exciting the displeasure of our brethren against us, it is our duty simply to follow God, and not to confer with flesh and blood.

**9** *For the zeal of thy house hath eaten me up*<sup>76</sup> David's enemies, no doubt, professed that nothing was farther from their mind than to touch the sacred name of God; but he reproves their hypocritical pretences, and affirms that he is fighting in God's quarrel. The manner in which he did this, he shows, was by the zeal for the Church of God with which his soul was inflamed. He not only assigns the cause of the evil treatment which he received — his zeal for the house of God — but also declares that whatever evil treatment he was undeservedly made the object of, yet, as it were, forgetting himself, he burned with a holy zeal to maintain the Church, and at the same time the glory of God, with which it is inseparably connected. To make this the more obvious, let it be observed, that although all boast in words of allowing to God the glory which belongs to him; yet

<sup>74</sup> That is, the confidence arising from the reflection that we are, in the *first* place, suffering unjustly; and, *secondly*, that we are suffering in the cause of God.

<sup>75</sup> "Qui convertissent en diffame et blasme le desir que les fideles ont de sa gloire." — *Fr.*

<sup>76</sup> The verb means not only 'to eat up, to devour,' but 'to corrode or consume,' by separating the parts from each other, as fire, (see Parkhurst on 2;) and the radical import of the Hebrew word for 'zeal,' seems to be 'to eat into, corrode, as fire.' The word (says Parkhurst) is, in the Hebrew Bible, generally applied to the fervent or ardent affections of the human frame, the effects of which are well known to be even like those of fire, corroding and consuming; and, accordingly, the poets, both ancient and modern, abound with descriptions of these ardent and consuming affections, taken from fire and its effects. (See on .) — *Mant*

when the law, the rule of virtuous and holy living, presents its claims to them, men only mock him, and not only so, but they furiously rush against him by the opposition which they make to his Word. They do this as if he willed to be honored and served merely with the breath of the lip, and had not rather erected a throne among men, from which to govern them by laws. David, therefore, here places the Church in the room of God; not that it was his intention to transfer to the Church what is proper to God, but to show the vanity of the pretensions which men make of being the people of God, when they shake themselves loose from the control of God's holy law, of which the Church is the faithful guardian. Besides, David had to deal with a class of men who, although a hypocritical and bastard race, professed to be the people of God; for all who adhered to Saul boasted of having a place in the Church, and stigmatised David as an apostate or a rotten member. With this unworthy treatment David was so far from being discouraged, that he willingly sustained all assaults for the defense of the true Church. He declares that he is unmoved by all the wrongs and revilings which he personally suffered at the hands of his enemies. Laying aside all concern about himself, he is disquieted and distressed only for the oppressed condition of the Church, or rather burns with anguish, and is consumed with the vehemence of his grief.

The second clause of the verse is to the same effect, denoting that he has nothing separate from God. Some explain it in a different sense, understanding it to mean that the wicked and proud, with the view of making an assault upon David, directed their fury and violence against God himself, and in this way indirectly pierced the heart of this holy man with their blasphemies, knowing as they did that nothing would be more grievous to him to bear than this. But this interpretation is too forced. Equally forced is that of those who consider David as intimating that he did not less prostrate himself in humble supplication at the mercy-seat whenever he heard the name of God torn by reproaches and blasphemy, than if he himself had been guilty of treason against the Divine Majesty. I therefore adhere to the opinion which I have already expressed, That David forgot what concerned himself, and that all the grief which he felt proceeded from the holy zeal with which he burned when he saw the sacred name of God insulted and outraged with horrible blasphemies. By this example we are taught, that whereas we are naturally so tender and delicate as to be unable to bear ignominy and reproach, we must endeavor to get quit of this unhappy state of mind, and ought rather to be grieved and agonised with the reproaches which are poured forth against God. On account of these, it becomes us to feel deep indignation, and even to give expression to this in strong language; but we ought to bear the wrongs and reproaches which we personally suffer without complaining. Until we have learned to set very little value upon our own reputation, we will never be inflamed with true zeal in contending for the preservation and advancement of the interests of the Divine glory. Besides, as David speaks in the name of the whole Church, whatever he says concerning himself behoved to be fulfilled in the supreme Head. It is, therefore, not surprising to find the Evangelists applying this passage to Christ, (John 2:17.) In like manner, Paul, in Romans 15:3, 5, 6, exhorting the faithful to imitate Christ, applies the second member to them all, and there also teaches us that the doctrine contained in it is very comprehensive, requiring them to devote themselves wholly to the advancement of the Divine glory, to endeavor in all their words and actions to preserve it unimpaired, and to be carefully on their guard that it may not be obscured by any fault of theirs. Since Christ, in whom there shines forth all the majesty of Deity, did not hesitate to expose himself to every species of reproach for the maintenance of his Father's glory, how base and shameful will it be for us to shrink from a similar lot.



## Psalm 69:10-13

**10.** And I wept, my soul fasted; and that was laid to me as a reproach. **11.** I also made sackcloth my clothing: and I became a proverb to them. **12.** They who sit in the gate defame me: and I am the song of those who drink intoxicating liquor. **13.** But as for me, my prayer is to thee, O Jehovah! in a time of thy favor, [or good-will,] O God: answer me in the multitude of thy mercy, in the truth of thy salvation.

**10.** *And I wept, my soul fasted* David here proves, by the signs or effects, that his efforts to promote the Divine glory proceeded from a pure and well-regulated zeal, inasmuch as he was not impelled or inflamed by the impetuosity of the flesh, but rather humbly abased himself before God, choosing him to be the witness of his sorrow. By this he shows the more evidently the incorrigible perversity of his enemies. It frequently happens, that those who set themselves boldly for the vindication of the glory of God, provoke and exasperate the wicked to a higher pitch by opposing them contentiously and without moderation. But David's zeal was so tempered that it ought to have softened even the hardness of steel. By this circumstance he, however, intended to show that he was oppressed with such violence by the frowardness of his enemies, that he dared not even open his mouth to speak a single word in defense of the cause of God, and no other means were left him of defending it but tears and mourning. He was deprived, as we know, of the liberty of giving utterance to the sentiments of his heart, or rather his words, as being those of a condemned person, would have been repelled with cruel reproaches. It was a proof of the greater constancy when in such circumstances he continued to burn with a zeal as unabated as ever, and persevered in the voluntary sorrow which he had engaged to exercise with the view of maintaining the honor and glory of God. He accordingly declares, *that he wept and that his soul fasted, and that he was clothed with sackcloth*; which were the tokens of mourning among the Jews. But his enemies turned all these things into mockery and jesting;<sup>77</sup> from which it is manifest that they were carried away with the fury of demons. It is of importance for us to be fortified with such an example, that in the present day we may not be discouraged when we meet with the same perversity by which the enemies of the Gospel prove themselves to be rather devils than men. We must, *however*, beware of pouring oil upon the fire which is already burning too fiercely, and should rather imitate David and Lot, who, although they had not liberty to rebuke the wicked, were yet deeply grieved in their hearts. And even when the wicked are constrained to hear us, mildness and humility will be a powerful means, or rather will be the best seasoning, for tempering holy zeal. Those who conceive of David as intimating that he resigned himself to suffer punishment in the room or stead of his enemies, attempt to confirm their opinion from his having clothed himself in sackcloth. But I take it more simply as meaning, that when he saw things in such a state of confusion, he voluntarily engaged in this sorrowful exercise to testify that nothing was more grievous to him than to witness the sacred name of God exposed to contumely.

**12.** *They who sit in the gate defame me* Had David been molested only by vulgar buffoons and the refuse of the people, it would have been more easily endured; for it is not surprising that mean persons, who have no regard to what is becoming and honorable, degrade themselves by indulging

<sup>77</sup> "That was turned to my reproach; i.e., it was made a subject of reproach to me." — Cresswell.

in defamation without shame. But when the very judges, forgetful of what is demanded by the dignity of their office, abandon themselves to the same audacious conduct, the iniquity and baseness of it is greatly aggravated. Accordingly, David expressly complains that he was made a by-word and a proverb by those in the highest ranks of life. The opinion of some who, by the expression, *they who sit in the gate*, understand the whole people,<sup>78</sup> is both frigid and inconsistent with the words of the text; for although men of every rank and condition assembled at the gates, yet none but the judges and counsellors sat there.<sup>79</sup> This is confirmed by the second clause of the verse; for by *those who drink strong drink*,<sup>80</sup> is doubtless meant the rulers who were elevated by their wealth and dignity. It was, indeed, very cruel treatment, that this holy man was not only harassed by the lower classes of the people, but that the very persons who presided in the cause of justice, and the dignitaries of the Church, were in this ringleaders to others. As the same thing happens in our own day, it is not without cause that the Holy Spirit has set this example before our eyes. In the Papacy we find that the higher a man is exalted in honor, he is proportionally the more violent and outrageous in his opposition to the Gospel and its ministers, that he may exhibit himself a more valiant defender of the Catholic faith. Yea, this is a malady with which almost all kings and princes are smitten; which arises from their not regarding true dignity and excellence as consisting in virtue, and from their thinking that they are entitled to act without restraint as they please. And what is the estimation in which they hold the faithful servants of Christ? It is a fact which cannot be denied, that one of the principal things about which they are concerned is, to scoff at and defame them, not only at their tables, but also on their thrones, in order, if possible, to shame them into a renunciation of their faith. In general, also, they sneer at all the people of God, and enjoy themselves in descanting upon their simplicity, as if they were fools in wearying and wasting themselves in the service of God.

**13.** *But as for me, my prayer is to thee, O Jehovah!* It was a sign of uncommon virtue in David, that even this hard treatment could not shake his mind, and sink him into despondency. He informs us of the means by which he fortified himself against that terrible stumbling-block. When the wicked directed against him their witty and scoffing remarks, as if engines of war, to overthrow his faith, the means to which he had recourse for repelling all their assaults was pouring out his heart in prayer to God. He was constrained to keep silence before men, and, being thus driven out from the world, he betook himself to God. In like manner, although the faithful in the present day may be unable to make any impression upon the wicked, yet they will ultimately triumph, provided they retire from the world, and go directly to God to present their prayers before him. The meaning, in short, is, that David, having tried every means in his power, and finding that his labor was to no purpose, left off dealing with men, and dealt with God only. What follows, *a time of thy favor, O God!* is explained otherwise by many interpreters, who read the two clauses of the verse in one

<sup>78</sup> “*They that sit in the gate* — vain and idle persons who spent their time there, in which there used to be a confluence of people.” — Rosenmuller. “*They that sit in the gate*; i.e., the elders. The expression may, however, be put for the crowd assembled there to hear the decisions of the magistrates: compare 2 Kings 7:1-18.” — Cresswell.

<sup>79</sup> Judges sat there in the exercise of their judicial functions; the gates of cities being anciently the places where courts of judicature were held for trying all causes, and deciding all affairs. See Job 29:7, compared with verses 12, 16, and 17; Deuteronomy 25:7; Ruth 4:1, 2; 1 Kings 22:10; Esther 2:19.

<sup>80</sup> “*Bibentes siceram*.” — Lat. Cresswell has the following note on this clause of the verse: “More literally, *I am the subject of the songs of them that drink siceram*. Siceram was, according to Chrysostom, an intoxicating liquor, made from the juice of the palm-tree; the fruit of that tree being bruised and fermented, was probably the beverage of the lower orders, like the *bouza* of Æthiopia.”

sentence, thus: *But as for me, I prayed to God in a time of his favor*; corresponding to that passage in Isaiah 55:6, “Call ye upon him while he is near.” Others resolve it thus: *I prayed that the time of favor might come, and that God would begin to be merciful to me*. But David is rather speaking of the consolation which he then received by reflecting with himself, that although it was now a time of trouble with him, and although his prayers seemed to be altogether unavailing, yet God’s favor would have its turn also. Thus the Prophet Habakkuk says,

“I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me.” (Habakkuk 2:1)

In like manner, Isaiah says,

“I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob;” (Isaiah 8:17)

and Jeremiah 14:22,) “We will wait upon thee.” The only means by which, in our affliction, we can obtain the victory, is by our having hope shining in us in the midst of darkness, and by our having the sustaining influence which arises from waiting for the favor of God. After David has thus fortified himself for continued perseverance in the attitude of waiting, he immediately adds, *Answer me in the multitude of thy goodness*; and to *goodness* he joins *the truth of salvation*,<sup>81</sup> intimating that God’s mercy is proved by indubitable effect when he succours his servants who are reduced to the very depths of despair. What prompted him to present this prayer was, the full persuasion which he had, that the darkness in which he was now involved would in due time be dispelled, and that a serene and unclouded season of God’s favor would succeed; a persuasion which arose from his recalling all his thoughts to God, lest he should faint by reason of the harassing treatment which he met with from the wicked.

### Psalm 69:14-18

**14.** Deliver me from the mire, that I may not sink: let me be delivered from my adversaries, and from the deep waters. **15.** Let not the flood of waters overflow me; and let not the deep swallow me up; and let not the pit<sup>82</sup> close its mouth upon me. **16.** Answer me, O Jehovah! for thy mercy<sup>83</sup> is good: in the multitude of thy compassions<sup>84</sup> look upon me. **17.** And hide not thy face from thy servant; for I am in trouble: hasten! answer me! **18.** Draw near to my soul, redeem it; deliver me, on account of my enemies.

**14.** *Deliver me from the mire, that I may not sink.* The Psalmist repeats the same similitude which he had used before, but in a different manner. He had previously said that he was sunk in the mire, and now he prays that he may not sink in it. In short, he now prays that those things may not now befall him which he had formerly complained of as having befallen him. But it is very easy to reconcile this diversity of statement; for in the opening of the psalm he spake according to his actual feeling and experience; but now, looking to the issue, although living in the midst of

<sup>81</sup> Dr Wells explains, *the truth of thy salvation*, as meaning, “according to the promises thou hast made of saving me.”

<sup>82</sup> “The Chaldee interpreter understands by *the pit*, Gehenna.” — *Cresswell*.

<sup>83</sup> The original word , *chesed*, here translated *mercy*, signifies, as Dr Adam Clarke observes, “*exuberance of kindness*.”

<sup>84</sup> , *rachamecha*, for *compassions*, signifies, according to the same author, such affection as mothers bear to their young, and in God there is , *rob*, a multitude of these.

death, he cherishes the hope of deliverance. This is expressed still more clearly in the last clause of the 15th verse, where he prays, *Let not the pit close its mouth upon me*; which is as if he had said, Let not the great multitude and weight of my afflictions overwhelm me, and let not sorrow swallow me up.

**16.** *Answer me, O Jehovah! for thy mercy is good.* The appeal which he here makes to the mercy and compassion of God is an evidence of the distressed condition into which he was brought. There can be no doubt that he sustained a dreadful conflict, when he had recourse to these as the only means of his safety. It is a very difficult matter to believe that God is merciful to us when he is angry with us, and that he is near us when he has withdrawn himself from us. David, aware of this, brings to his view a subject which he may oppose to this distrust, and by pleading for the exercise of the mercy and great compassions of God towards him, shows, that the only consideration which inspired him with hope was the benignant and merciful character of God. When he says, a little after, *Look upon me*, it is a prayer that God would make it manifest in very deed that he had heard him by granting him succor. In the following verse he utters a similar prayer. And by repeating so often the same things, he declares both the bitterness of his grief and the ardor of his desires. When he beseeches God *not to hide his face*, it is not from any apprehension which he entertained of being rejected, but because those who are oppressed with calamities cannot avoid being agitated and distracted with mental disquietude. But as God, in a peculiar manner, invites his servants to him, David avows that he is one of their number. In thus speaking, as I have already shown, and will afterwards have occasion to state at greater length, he does not boast of services on account of which he could prefer any claim to a divine reward, but rather depends on the gratuitous election of God; although, at the same time, he is to be understood as adducing the service which he had faithfully yielded to God by whom he was called, as an evidence of his godliness.

**18.** *Draw near to my soul, redeem it.* David was doubtless fully persuaded by faith that God was near him; but as we are accustomed to measure the presence or absence of God by the effects, David here tacitly complains, judging according to the flesh, that he is far from him. By the expression, *Draw near*, he means, that in so far as could be gathered from his actual condition, God appeared to have no regard to his welfare. Again, by calling upon God *to draw near to his life*, which he seemed to have forsaken, he exhibits a striking proof of the strength of his faith. The more cruelly he is molested by the wicked and proud, the more does he trust that God will appear to deliver him. As has been elsewhere observed, it is always to be held as an undoubted truth, that since “God resisteth the proud” (James 4:6,) he must at length repress the insolence and pride of those who obstinately resist him, although he may seem to connive at them for a time.

### Psalm 69:19-21

**19.** Thou knowest my reproach, and my confusion, and my ignominy: all my adversaries are before thee. **20.** Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am afflicted: and I looked for one to take pity upon me, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. **21.** And they put gall into my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

**19** *Thou knowest my reproach, and my confusion.* This is a confirmation of the preceding sentence. Whence is it that the greater part of men become dispirited when they see the wicked outrageously rushing upon them, and their wickedness, like a water-flood, carrying all before it, but because they think that heaven is so obscured and overcast with clouds as to prevent God from beholding what is done upon the earth? It becomes us, therefore, in this matter, to call to our remembrance the doctrine of a Divine Providence, that contemplating it we may be assured beyond all doubt, that God will appear for our succor in due season; for he cannot, on the one hand, shut his eyes to our miseries, and it is impossible for him, on the other, to allow the license which the wicked take in doing evil to pass with impunity, without denying himself. David, therefore, takes comfort from the consideration that God is the witness of his grief, fear, sorrows, and cares; nothing being hidden from the eye of Him who is the judge and governor of the world. Nor is it a vain repetition when he speaks so frequently of his *reproach and shame*. As he was subjected to such dreadful assaults of temptations as might have made the stoutest heart to tremble, it was indispensably necessary for his own defense to oppose to them a strong barrier for resistance. Nothing is more bitter to men of an ingenuous and noble spirit than reproach; but when this is repeated, or rather when shame and reproach are heaped upon us, how needful is it then for us to possess more than ordinary strength, that we may not thereby be overwhelmed? for when succor is delayed, our patience is very apt to give way, and despair very easily creeps in upon us. This shame and reproach may very properly be referred both to the outward appearance and to the actual feelings of the mind. It is well known that he was everywhere held in open derision; and the mockeries which he experienced could not but strike into him both shame and sorrow. For the same reason he subjoins that *his enemies are before God*, or known to him; as if he had said, Lord, thou knowest how, like a poor sheep, I am surrounded by thousands of wolves.

**20.** *Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am afflicted.* He expresses more distinctly not only that he was confounded, or ashamed at the sad aspect which he presented of having been deserted, but that he was well nigh overwhelmed with sorrow by lying so long under reproach and shame. Whence it is evident that he did not overcome this sorrow without a struggle; and that the reason why he so firmly withstood the waves of temptations was, not because they did not reach his heart, but because, being sorely smitten, he made resistance with a corresponding degree of intrepidity. He states, as an additional aggravation of his distress, that every office of humanity was withheld from him: that there was nobody who had compassion upon him, or to whom he could disburden his griefs. Some take the word *νυδ*, *nud*, for *to tell* or *recount*; and undoubtedly when we pour out our complaints to our friends, it affords some alleviation to our distress. Thus he employs as an argument for obtaining mercy from God, the consideration that he was deprived of all aid and comfort from his fellow-men.

**21.** *And they put gall into my meat.* Here he again repeats that his enemies carry their cruelty towards him to the utmost extent in their power. He speaks metaphorically when he describes them as *mingling gall* or *poison with his meat*,<sup>85</sup> and *vinegar with his drink*; even as it is said in Jeremiah,

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<sup>85</sup> The word *νυδ*, *rosh*, here denominated *gall*, is thought by Celsius, Michaelis, Boothroyd, and others, to be *hemlock*. According to Dr Adam Clarke and Williams, it refers to *bitters* in general, and particularly those of a deleterious nature. Bochart, from a comparison of this passage with John 19:29, thinks that *νυδ*, *rosh*, is the same herb as the Evangelist calls ὕσσωπος, "hyssop;" a species of which growing in Judea, he proves from Isaac Ben Orman, an Arabian writer, to be so bitter, as not to be eatable. Theophylact expressly tells us that the hyssop was added as being deleterious or poisonous; and 'Nonnus' paraphrase is, "one gave the deadly acid mixed with hyssop." See Parkhurst on *νυδ*. The word occurs in Deuteronomy 29:18; 32:33; and is, in the

“Behold, I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink.” (Jeremiah 9:15)

But still the Apostle John justly declares that this Scripture was fulfilled when the soldiers gave Christ vinegar to drink upon the cross, (John 19:28-30;) for it was requisite that whatever cruelty the reprobate exercise towards the members of Christ, should by a visible sign be represented in Christ himself. We have stated on the same principle, in our remarks upon Psalm 22:18, that when the soldiers parted the garments of Christ among them, that verse was appropriately quoted, “They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots;” although David’s object was to express by figurative language that he was robbed, and that all his goods were violently taken from him, and made a prey of by his enemies. The natural sense must, however, be retained; which is, that the holy prophet had no relief afforded him; and that he was in a condition similar to that of a man who, already too much afflicted, found, as an additional aggravation of his distress, that his meat was poisoned, and his drink rendered nauseous by the bitter ingredients with which it had been mingled.

### Psalm 69:22-29

**22.** Let <sup>86</sup> their table before them be for a snare; and their prosperity <sup>87</sup> [or things for peace] for a net. **23.** Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see; and make their loins continually to tremble. **24.** Pour out thy wrath upon them; and let thy hot displeasure seize them. **25.** Let their habitation be desolate; let none dwell in their tent; **26.** For they have persecuted him whom thou hast smitten; and they have added to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded, [literally of thy wounded ones.] **27.** Add iniquity to their iniquity; and let them not enter into thy righteousness. **28.** Let them be blotted out from the book of the living; and let them not be written among the righteous. **29.** As for me, I am poor and sorrowful; thy salutation shall exalt me.

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latter place, rendered *poison* In Hosea 10:4, it is rendered *hemlock*; and in Amos 6:12, it is put in apposition with a word there translated *hemlock*, although the same word is also rendered *wormwood*

*Vinegar*, we conceive, here means sour wine, such as was given to slaves or prisoners in the East. Persons in better circumstances used lemons or pomegranates to give their drink a grateful acidity. It was therefore a great insult offered to a royal personage to give him in his thirst the refreshment of a slave or of a wretched prisoner; and David employs this figure to express the insults which were offered to him by his enemies. See *Harmer’s Observations*, volume 2, pp. 158, 159.

<sup>86</sup> This and the following verses, which are here expressed in the form of imprecations, are translated by many in the future tense, as predictions: “Their table before them shall be for a snare,” etc.

<sup>87</sup> The LXX. have rendered the word here translated *prosperity* by a word which signifies *recompense*: “Let their table before them be for a snare, και εις ανταπόδοσιν, *and for a recompense*, and for a stumbling-block.” Paul, in quoting this and the verse immediately following, as descriptive of the judgments which befell the Jews after their rejection of the Messiah, quotes with some slight difference the words of the LXX. He has, Εις ανταπόδομα αὐτοῖς, “for a retribution upon them.” The Psalmist’s enemies had given him gall for his meat, and in his thirst vinegar to drink, and he denounces on them evils similar in kind: as if he had said, Would that their own table may be made bitter by misery and misfortune, and the food provided for the nourishment and strengthening of their bodies turned, in the righteous retribution of God, into the means of their injury and destruction. “Michaelis,” says Walford, “shows how exactly these comminations were fulfilled in the history of the final siege of Jerusalem by the Romans. Many thousands of the Jews had assembled in the city to eat the Paschal lamb, when Titus unexpectedly made an assault upon them. In this siege the greater part of the inhabitants of Jerusalem miserably perished.”

**22.** *Let their table before them be for a snare.* Here we have a series of dire imprecations, with respect to which we must bear in mind, what we have elsewhere observed, that David did not allow himself recklessly to pour out his wrath, even as the greater part of men, when they feel themselves wronged, intemperately give way to their own passion; but, being under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he was kept from going beyond the bounds of duty,<sup>88</sup> and simply called upon God to exercise just judgment against the reprobate. Farther, it was not on his own account that he pleaded in this manner; but it was a holy zeal for the divine glory which impelled him to summon the wicked to God's judgment-seat. It was also owing to this: that he was not carried away by violence of passion, like those who are actuated by a desire of taking revenge. Since, then, the Spirit of wisdom, uprightness, and moderation, put these imprecations into the mouth of David, his example cannot justly be pleaded in self-vindication by those who pour forth their wrath and spite upon every one that comes in their way, or who are carried away by a foolish impatience to take revenge; never allowing themselves to reflect for a moment what good purpose this can serve, nor making any efforts to keep their passion within due bounds. We need wisdom by which to distinguish between those who are wholly reprobate and those of whose amendment there is still some hope; we have also need of uprightness, that none may devote himself exclusively to his own private interests; and of moderation too, to dispose our minds to calm endurance. It being evident, then, that David was distinguished by these three qualities, whoever would follow him aright, must not allow himself to break forth with reckless and blind impetuosity into the language of imprecation; he must, moreover, repress the turbulent passions of his mind, and, instead of confining his thoughts exclusively to his own private interests, should rather employ his desires and affections in seeking to advance the glory of God. In short, if we would be true imitators of David, we must first clothe ourselves with the character of Christ, that he may not administer to us at the present day the same rebuke which he gave to two of his disciples of old,

“Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of,”

(Luke 9:55.)

David had complained that his enemies mingled his meat with gall; and now he prays that their table may be turned into a snare for them, and that the things which are for peace may be turned into a net for them. These expressions are metaphorical, and they imply a desire that whatever things had been allotted to them in providence for the preservation of life, and for their welfare and convenience, might be turned by God into the occasion or instrument of their destruction. From this we gather that as things which naturally and of themselves are hurtful, become the means of furthering our welfare when we are in favor with God; so, when his anger is kindled against us, all those things which have a native tendency to produce our happiness are cursed, and become so many causes of our destruction. It is an instance of the Divine justice, which ought deeply to impress our minds with awe, when the Holy Spirit declares that all the means of preserving life are deadly to the reprobate, (Titus 1:15;) so that the very sun, which carries healing under his wings, (Malachi 4:2,) breathes only a deadly exhalation for them.

**23.** *Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see.* The Psalmist here refers chiefly to two powers of the body, those of *the eyes* and of *the loins*; and I have no hesitation in considering his language as a prayer that God would deprive his enemies of reason and understanding, and at the same time enfeeble their strength, that they might be altogether unfitted for exerting themselves in

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<sup>88</sup> “Mais estant conduit par le Saint Esprit, il n'a point passe outre les limites.” — *Fr.*

any way. We know how indispensable it is, in order to the doing of any thing aright, that counsel go before to give light, and that there should also be added the power of putting what is purposed into execution. The curse here expressed impends over the heads of all the enemies of the Church; and, therefore, we have no reason to be terrified at the malice or fury of the wicked. God, whenever he pleases, can strike them suddenly with blindness, that they may see nothing, and by breaking their loins,<sup>89</sup> lay them prostrate in shame and confusion.

**24.** *Pour out thy fury upon them.* It is not surprising that David utters a lengthened series of imprecations; for we know well that the frantic enemies of the Church, into whom it was his object to inspire terror, are not easily moved. He therefore lifts up his voice against them in tones of greater vehemence, that they might be led to desist from their wrongful and insolent conduct. He, however, had principally an eye to true believers, who, being oppressed with calamities, have no other stay to lean upon, but such as arises from the voice which they hear proceeding from the mouth of God, declaring the terrible vengeance which is prepared for their enemies, if, indeed, they are among the reprobate. As to those of whose repentance and amendment there was some hope, David would have had them to be corrected by chastisements; but as to those whose repentance and reformation were hopeless, he prays that destruction may fall upon their heads, that thus they might not escape the punishment which was appointed for them, and which they had deserved.

**25** *Let their habitation be desolate.* Here he proceeds farther than in the preceding verse, praying that God would cause his wrath to descend to their posterity; and it is no new thing for the sins of the fathers to be cast into the bosom of the children. As David uttered these imprecations by the inspiration and influence of the Holy Spirit, so he took them out of the law itself, in which God threatens that he will

“visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him,” (Exodus 20:5)

In this way he desires that the memorial of them may be cursed, and that thus God would not spare them even after their death.

**26.** *For they have persecuted him whom thou hast smitten.* He brings forward the crime with which they were chargeable, to make it manifest that they richly deserved such dreadful punishments. Some explain the verse in this way: “These enemies, O Lord! not content with the strokes which thou hast inflicted, have exercised their cruelty upon a wretched man, who had already been wounded by thy hand.” And as it is the dictate of humanity to succor the afflicted, he who treads down the oppressed most assuredly betrays the brutal cruelty of his disposition. Others reject this exposition, whether upon sufficient ground I know not, observing that David, properly speaking, was not stricken or wounded by the hand of God, it being of the violent rage of his enemies that he complains through the whole of the psalm. Accordingly, they have recourse to a subtle interpretation, and view David as meaning that his enemies wickedly pretended that they had just cause against him, and boasted of being the ministers of God, whose office it was to execute punishment upon him as a wicked person. This is a pretext under which the wicked generally shield themselves, and by which they are led to think that they may lawfully do what they please against those who are in misery, without ever being called to account for it. Thus we find this purpose of the wicked expressed in another place,

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<sup>89</sup> The loins are the seat of strength in every animal; and hence the prayer, “Make their loins continually to tremble,” is just a prayer that their strength might be impaired, or entirely taken away.



“Come let us persecute him, for God hath forsaken him; for there is none to deliver him,” (Psalm 71:11.)

But I am rather of opinion that the Psalmist applies the term *smitten* to the man whom God intended to humble as one of his own children; so that in the very chastisement or correction, there was engraven a mark of God’s paternal love. And he employs the expression, *the wounded of God*, almost in the same sense in which Isaiah 26:19 speaks of *the dead of God*, the prophet thereby denoting those who continue under the Divine guardianship, even in death itself. This cannot be extended to all men in general, but is exclusively applicable to true believers, whose obedience God puts to the test by means of afflictions. If from this the wicked take occasion to persecute the righteous with greater severity, it is not to be wondered at if they involve themselves in heavier damnation. Upon seeing such examples set before them, the manner in which they should have reasoned with themselves is this,

“If these things are done in a green tree,  
what shall be done in the dry?” (Luke 23:31.)

But from their becoming more and more hardened, it is evident that the pride and insolence which they manifest against the children of God proceed from contempt and hatred of true religion. The Hebrew word , *yesapperu*, which is usually translated *they will recount*, I would interpret differently. It properly signifies *to number*, and may, therefore, be properly enough translated *to add to* or *increase*,<sup>90</sup> giving here the meaning, That the persons spoken of, by adding misery to misery, raised grief to its utmost height.

**27.** *Add iniquity to their iniquity.* As the Hebrew word , *avon*, signifies at times *guilt* as well as *iniquity*, some translate the verse thus, *Add thou*, that is, thou, O God! *punishment to their punishment* Others extend it yet further, regarding it as a prayer that wicked men might punish them for their wickedness. But it is abundantly evident, from the second clause, that what David prays for rather is, as is almost universally admitted, that God, taking his Spirit altogether from the wicked, would give them over to a reprobate mind, that they might never seek or have any desire to be brought to genuine repentance and amendment. Some interpret the phrase *to come into righteousness* as meaning *to be absolved or acquitted*;<sup>91</sup> but it seems to want the spirit of the language here used, by which David intends to express much more. Accordingly, the words ought to be expounded thus: Let their wickedness increase more and more, and let them turn away with abhorrence from all thought of amendment, to make it manifest that they are utterly alienated from God.<sup>92</sup> As this form of expression is familiar to the Sacred Writings, and every where to be met with, we ought not to think it harsh; and to wrest it, as some do, for the sake of avoiding what may have the appearance of absurdity, is ridiculous. The explanation they give of it is, That God adds sins to sins by permitting them;<sup>93</sup> and they defend such an exposition by asserting that this is an

<sup>90</sup> This is the translation given by the LXX., who read, προσέθηκαν, “they added to;” and similar is that of the Syriac, Vulgate, Arabic, and Æthiopic versions, and of the learned Castellio, who reads, “Sauciorum tuorum numerum adaugentes,” “increasing the number of thy wounded.” “ ,” says Hammond, “signifies *to number*, and of that we know *addition* is one sort.”

<sup>91</sup> This is the idea attached to it by Horsley, who translates the verse thus: “Give them punishment upon punishment, and admit them not to thy justification.” Cresswell explains it thus: “Let them not be restored to thy favor, nor experience thy clemency.”

<sup>92</sup> “Qu’ils sont alienez et bannis de la presence de Dieu.” — *Fr.* “That they are alienated and banished from the presence of God.”

<sup>93</sup> This is the explanation given by Hammond. The Hebrew word , *nathan*, here rendered *add*, he translates *give or permit*, which he supports in the following note. “That , *to give*, signifies also *to permit*, appears by Esther 9:13, , ‘let it be given to

idiom of the Hebrew language, an assertion, the accuracy of which no Hebrew scholar will admit. Nor is it necessary to bring forward any such quibbles to excuse God; for, when he blinds the reprobate, it is sufficient for us to know that he has good and just causes for doing so; and it is in vain for men to murmur and to dispute with him, as if they sinned only by his impulse. Although the causes why they are blinded sometimes lie hidden in the secret purpose of Deity, there is not a man who is not reprov'd by his own conscience; and it is our duty to adore and admire the high mysteries of God, which surpass our understanding. It is justly said that "God's judgments are a great deep," (Psalm 36:6.) It would certainly be highly perverse to involve God in a part of the guilt of the wicked, whenever he executes his judgments upon them; as, for example, when he executes the judgment threatened in the passage before us. The amount is, that the wicked are plunged into a deep gulf of wickedness by the just vengeance of Heaven, that they may never return to a sound understanding, and that he who is filthy may become still more filthy,<sup>94</sup> (Revelation 22:11.) Let it further be observed, that I do not explain *the righteousness of God* as denoting the righteousness which he bestows upon his chosen ones in regenerating them by his Holy Spirit, but the holiness manifested in the life which is so well-pleasing to him.

**28.** *Let them be blotted out from the book of the living.*<sup>95</sup> This is the last imprecation, and it is the most dreadful of the whole; but it nevertheless uniformly follows the persevered in impenitence and incorrigible obduracy of which the Psalmist has spoken above. After having taken away from them all hope of repentance, he denounces against them eternal destruction, which is the obvious meaning of the prayer, that they might be blotted out of the book of the living; for all those must inevitably perish who are not found written or enrolled in the book of life. This is indeed an improper manner of speaking; but it is one well adapted to our limited capacity, the book of life being nothing else than the eternal purpose of God, by which he has predestinated his own people to salvation. God, it is certain, is absolutely immutable; and, further, we know that those who are adopted to the hope of salvation were written before the foundation of the world, (Ephesians 1:4;) but as God's eternal purpose of election is incomprehensible, it is said, in accommodation to the imperfection of the human understanding, that those whom God openly, and by manifest signs, enrolls among his people, *are written*. On the other hand, those whom God openly rejects and casts out of his Church are, for the same reason, said *to be blotted out*. As then David desires that the vengeance of God may be manifested, he very properly speaks of the reprobation of his enemies in language accommodated to our understanding; as if he had said, O God! reckon them not among the number

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the Jews,' *i.e.*, permitted them. So Exodus 12:23, 'And shall not suffer (the Hebrew hath *give*) the destroyer to come in; the Chaldee reads *permit*,' and the LXX. ἀθήσει, to the same sense. So Psalm 16:10, 'Thou shalt not suffer ( *give*) thy Holy One to see corruption.' And so *give wickedness*, is no more than permit: for so it is ordinary with God, as a punishment of some former great sin or sins, though not to infuse any malignity, yet by withdrawing his grace, and delivering them up to themselves, to permit more sins to follow, one on the heels of the other, and so to be so far from reforming and amending as daily to grow worse and worse, to be more obdurate, and so finally never to enter into God's righteousness; *i.e.*, into that way of obedience required by him, and which will be accepted by him, or (as *mercy*, in the notion of *mercy*, may signify being applied to God) *into his mercy*, so as to be made partakers of it." A fuller statement and illustration of Calvin's views on this point is given in his Institutes, Book I. chapter 18.

<sup>94</sup> In the French version, the two last verbs of the sentence are put in the future tense, by which the idea conveyed is somewhat modified: "En sorte qu'ils ne retourneront jamais, a bon sens, et celui qui est ord, deviendra encore plus ord." — "So that they shall never return to a sound understanding, and he who is filthy will become still more filthy."

<sup>95</sup> "This phrase," observes Bishop Mant, "which is not unusual in Scripture, alludes to the custom of well ordered cities, which kept registers, containing all the names of the citizens. Out of these registers the names of apostates, fugitives, and criminals, were erased, as also those of the deceased: whence the expression 'blotting,' or 'erasing names from the book of life.'"

or ranks of thy people, and let them not be gathered together with thy Church; but rather show by destroying them that thou hast rejected them; and although they occupy a place for a time among thy faithful ones, do thou at length cut them off, to make it manifest that they were aliens, though they were mingled with the members of thy family. Ezekiel uses language of similar import when he says,

“And mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies: they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel.” (Ezekiel 13:9)

That, however, continues true which is spoken by the Apostle John, (1 John 2:19,) that none who have been once really the children of God will ever finally fall away or be wholly cut off.<sup>96</sup> But as hypocrites presumptuously boast that they are the chief members of the Church, the Holy Spirit well expresses their rejection, by the figure of their being blotted out of the book of life. Moreover, it is to be observed that, in the second clause, all the elect of God are called *the righteous*; for, as Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 4, 7,

“This is the will of God, even our sanctification, that every one of us should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor: for God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.” (1 Thessalonians 4:3, 4, 7)

And the climax which the same Apostle uses in the 8th chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, at the 30th verse, is well known:

“Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified.” (Romans 8:30)

**29.** *As for me, I am poor and sorrowful.*<sup>97</sup> From this verse we perceive more distinctly how David cast away from him the swelling and raging passion of those who, with ungovernable fury, pour forth imprecation and vengeance. He here, without doubt, offers himself to God with the sacrifice of a broken and humble heart, that by this meekness of spirit he may obtain favor with him. He therefore adds immediately after, *Thy salvation shall exalt me*. Those assuredly who are impelled to avenge themselves by their own ungovernable spirits are so far from being humbled, that they exalt themselves to a position to which they are not entitled. There is here a mutual relation stated between the sorrow with which he was oppressed, and the help of God by which he hoped to be lifted up. At the same time, he assures himself that the very thing which others considered as a ground for despair, would prove to him the cause of his salvation. This sentence might also be explained adversatively thus: Although I now mourn under the pressure of affliction, yet shall thy salvation, O Lord! exalt me. But for my part, I consider it certain that David brings forward his own affliction as a plea for obtaining mercy at the hand of God. Nor does he say simply that he will be raised up, but he expressly speaks of *being exalted*; and in this he alludes to fortresses which are set upon high places; for this is the proper signification of the Hebrew word *sagab*, here employed.

<sup>96</sup> “Et se retrancher du tout.” — *Fr.*

<sup>97</sup> Boothroyd reads, “humbled and afflicted!”

### Psalm 69:30-33

**30.** I will celebrate the name of God in a song, and I will magnify him in praise.<sup>98</sup> **31.** And this will please Jehovah more than a young bullock that hath horns and hoofs. **32.** The afflicted have seen it, and those who seek God shall rejoice at it; and your heart shall live. **33.** For Jehovah hath hearkened to the afflicted; and hath not despised his prisoners.

**30.** *I will celebrate the name of God in a song.* The Psalmist now elevated with joy, and sustained by the confident hope of deliverance, sings the triumphant strains of victory. This psalm, there is every reason to believe, was composed after he had been delivered from all apprehension of dangers; but there can be no doubt that the very topics with which it concludes were the matter of his meditation, when trembling with anxiety in the midst of his troubles; for he laid hold upon the grace of God by assured faith, although that grace was then hidden from him, and only the matter of his hope. God is here said *to be magnified by our praises*; not because any addition can be made to his dignity and glory, which are infinite, but because by our praises his name is exalted among men.

**31.** *And this will please Jehovah more than a young bullock.* The more effectually to strengthen himself for this exercise, David affirms that the thanksgiving which he is about to tender, will be to God a sacrifice of a sweet and an acceptable savor. There cannot be a more powerful incitement to thanksgiving than the certain conviction that this religious service is highly pleasing to God; even as the only recompense which he requires for all the benefits which he lavishes upon us is, that we honor and praise his name. This sets in a stronger light the inexcusableness of those who are so sluggish as, by their silence or forgetfulness, to suppress the praises of God. David neither omitted nor despised the outward sacrifices which the law enjoined; but he very justly preferred the spiritual service, which was the end of all the Levitical ceremonies. This subject I have treated at greater length on Psalm 50:14. By the way, the humility of David is worthy of being noticed, who, although he rose so high as to be a heavenly pattern, yet disdained not to humble himself for the common benefit of the Church, as if he had belonged to the common class of the people, that by the figures of the law he might learn the truth which has since been more clearly manifested in the gospel; namely, that the praises of God, in so far as they proceed from our mouths, are impure, until they are sanctified by Christ. But how gross and stupid is the superstition of those who would again bring into use the outward pomp of ceremonies which were abolished by the one sacrifice of Christ's death, and think that God is truly pacified when they have wearied themselves with doing nothing! What does this amount to, but to obscure or cover, by the intervention of thick veils, this legitimate service of thanksgiving, which David had no hesitation in greatly preferring to the Mosaic ceremonies, although these were of divine appointment? By *a young bullock*, he means one of the most choice or select and the idea which he intends to convey is, that there was no sacrifice or victim, however valuable or precious, that he could offer, in which God would take so great delight as in thanksgiving.

<sup>98</sup> Venema and others conjecture, that what follows, from this verse to the end of the psalm, was added during the captivity of the Jews in Babylon; while others, from the expressions occurring in these verses, refer the whole psalm to that period; and observe, that the Hebrew letter *lamed*, prefixed to David's name in the title, does not always signify *of*; but sometimes, as in Genesis 1:11, means *according to*, and so may be intended to describe this psalm as being after the manner of David. But Paul, in Romans 11:9, ascribes it to David.

**32.** *The afflicted have seen it.* He here shows that the blessed effects of his deliverance will extend to others as well as to himself, a point which he frequently insists on in the Psalms, as we have seen in Psalm 22:23, 26, and in many other places. And his object in doing this is, partly to commend the goodness and grace of God to true believers, and partly that by this as an argument he may prevail with God to succor him. Besides, he does not mean that God's people would rejoice at this spectacle merely on the ground of brotherly friendship, but because, in the deliverance of one man, a pledge would be given to others, affording them also assurance of salvation. For this very reason he terms them *the afflicted*. Whoever seek God, (says he,) although they may be subjected to afflictions, will nevertheless take courage from my example. The first and the second clauses of the verse must be read together; for a connected sense would not be preserved were we not to understand the meaning to be this, That the example of David would afford a ground of rejoicing to all the faithful servants of God when they should seek a remedy for their afflictions. He very properly conjoins the desire of seeking God with affliction; for all men do not so profit under the chastening hand of God as to seek salvation from him in the exercise of a sincere and ardent faith. In the concluding part of this verse there is a change of person: *And your heart shall live*. But this apostrophe is so far from rendering the sense obscure, that, on the contrary, it expresses it the more forcibly, as if a thing present were described. In addressing those who were so much under the pressure of affliction as to be laid prostrate like dead men, he exhibits to their view a kind of image of the resurrection; as if he had said, O ye who are dead! unto you new vigor shall be restored. It is not meant that faith perishes in the children of God, and remains entirely dead until it is quickened into life again by the example of the deliverance of others; but that the light which was quenched is rekindled, and thus, so to speak, recovers life anew. The Psalmist immediately after (verse 33) describes the means by which this will be brought about in the children of God, which is, that believing the deliverance of David to be a common token or pledge of the grace of God presented before them, they will confidently come to the conclusion, that God regards the needy, and does not despise the prisoners. We thus see that he considers what was done to one man, as a clear indication on the part of God that he will be ready to succor all who are in adversity.<sup>99</sup>

### Psalm 69:34-36

**34.** Let the heavens and the earth praise him; the seas, and whatever creepeth in them. **35.** For God will save Zion, and will build the cities of Judah; and they shall dwell there, and possess it by inheritance. **36.** And the seed of his servants shall inherit it; and they who love his name shall dwell in it.

**34.** *Let the heavens and the earth praise him.* From this we may conclude with the greater certainty, that, as I have touched upon above, David in the whole of this psalm spake in the name of the whole Church; for he now transfers to the Church what he had spoken in particular concerning himself. In calling upon the elements, which are destitute of thought or understanding, to praise God, he speaks hyperbolically, and by this manner of expression, he would teach us that we are

<sup>99</sup> "Tous ceux qui seront oppressez a tort." — Fr. "All who shall be wrongfully oppressed."

not animated with sufficient earnestness of heart in celebrating the praises of God, the infinitude of which overpasses the whole world, unless we rise above our own understandings. But what above all kindled this ardor in the heart of David was his concern for the preservation of the Church. Moreover, there is no doubt that by the Spirit of prophecy he comprehended the whole of that period during which God would have the kingdom and priesthood continued among the ancient people of Israel. Yet he begins at the restoration of a new state of things, which by his means was suddenly brought about upon the death of Saul, when a melancholy devastation threatened at once the utter destruction of the worship of God, and the desolation of the whole country. He says, in the first place, that *Zion shall be saved*, because God would defend the place where he had chosen to be called upon, and would not suffer the worship which he himself had appointed to be abolished. In the next place, from the ark of the covenant and the sanctuary, he represents the divine blessing as extending to the whole land; for religion was the foundation upon which the happiness of the people rested. He farther teaches, that this change to the better would not be of short continuance; but that the people would be always preserved safe through the constant and enduring protection of God: *And they shall dwell there, and possess it by inheritance*. He therefore intimates, that the promise which God had so often made in the law, That they should inherit that land forever, was truly confirmed by the commencement of his reign. He contrasts tranquil and settled abode with a mere temporary residence; as if he had said, Now that the sacred throne is erected, the time is come in which the children of Abraham will enjoy the rest which has been promised to them, without fear of being removed from it.

**36.** *And the seed of his servants shall inherit it.* In this verse he declares that the blessing now mentioned would extend through a continued succession of ages — that, the fathers would transmit to their children the possession which they had received, as from hand to hand, and the children to their children; and the enduring possession of all good things depends upon Christ, of whom David was a type. Yet the Psalmist at the same time briefly intimates, that such only as are the legitimate children of Abraham shall inherit the land: *They who love his name shall dwell in it*. It was needful to take away all grounds for self-gloriation from hypocrites, who, looking to and depending solely upon the circumstances connected with the origin of their race, foolishly boasted that the land belonged to them by right of inheritance, notwithstanding of their having apostatised from the faith of their ancestors. Although that land was given to the chosen people to be possessed until the advent of Christ, we should remember that it was a type of the heavenly inheritance, and that, therefore, what is here written concerning the protection of the Church, has received a more true and substantial fulfillment in our own day. There is no reason to fear that the building of the spiritual temple, in which the celestial power of God has been manifested, will ever fall into ruins.

# PSALM 70

This psalm is merely a part of the fortieth, and the inscription, *To call to remembrance*, is perhaps designed to indicate this; David having taken these five verses out of that other psalm, and accommodated them for being used on some particular occasion. I shall only here repeat the words of the text; and would refer the reader for the interpretation to the proper place.

*To the chief musician of David, to call to remembrance.*

## **Psalm 70:1-5**

**1.** O God! make haste to deliver me: O Jehovah! hasten to my help. **2.** Let those who seek my life be ashamed and confounded; let those who desire my hurt be turned backward, and put to confusion **3.** Let those who say to me, Aha! aha! perish as a reward of their shame. **4.** Let all those who seek thee rejoice and exult in thee: let those who love thy salvation say, Let God be magnified for evermore! **5.** As for me, I am poor and needy: O God! hasten to me: thou art my help and my deliverer: O Jehovah! make no delay.

## PSALM 71<sup>100</sup>

David, having spoken at the outset of his confidence in God, partly calls upon him for deliverance, and partly complains of the pride of his enemies. At length, to confirm his faith, he prepares himself for yielding a grateful ascription of praise for the benefits which God had conferred upon him.

### Psalm 71:1-4

**1.** In thee, O Jehovah! do I put my trust; let me not be put to confusion for ever. **2.** Deliver me in thy righteousness, and rescue me: incline thy ear to me, and save me. **3.** Be thou to me for a rock of strength,<sup>101</sup> [or for a strong rock,] into which I may at all times enter: thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my tower and my fortress. **4.** O my God! deliver me from the hand of the wicked man; from the hand of the perverse and violent man.

**1.** *In thee, O Jehovah! do I put my trust.* It has been thought that the occasion of the composition of this psalm was the conspiracy of Absalom; and the particular reference which David makes to his old age renders this conjecture not improbable. As when we approach God, it is faith alone which opens the way for us, David, in order to obtain what he sought, protests, according to his usual manner, that he does not pour forth at the throne of grace hypocritical prayers, but betakes himself to God with sincerity of heart, fully persuaded that his salvation is laid up in the Divine hand. The man whose mind is in a state of constant fluctuation, and whose hope is divided by being turned in different directions, in each of which he is looking for deliverance, or who, under the influence of fear, disputes with himself, or who obstinately refuses the Divine assistance, or who frets and gives way to restless impatience, is unworthy of being succoured by God. The particle *leolam*, in the end of the first verse, which we have translated *for ever*, admits of a twofold sense, as I have shown on Psalm 31:1. It either tacitly implies a contrast between the present calamities of David and the happy issue which he anticipated; as if he had said, Lord, I lie in the dust at present as one confounded; but the time will come when thou wilt grant me deliverance. Or *not to be ashamed for ever*, means never to be ashamed. As these verses almost correspond with the beginning of the 31st psalm, I would refer to that place for those explanatory remarks which I here purposely omit, not wishing to tax the patience of my readers by unnecessary repetition.

In these words of the third verse, *Into which I may at all times enter*, which are not to be found in the other psalm, David briefly prays that he may have so ready and easy access to God for succor, as to find in him a secure refuge whenever threatened by any immediate danger. Lord! as if he had said, let me always find ready succor in thee, and do thou meet me with a smile of benignity and grace, when I betake myself to thee. The expression which follows, *Thou hast given commandment*

<sup>100</sup> "Although this psalm has no title, it is by general consent ascribed to David, and supposed to have been composed during Absalom's revolt, as he mentions his old age, and his danger of perishing. It is almost a copy of Psalm 31; and, as the passages in the present psalm, which refer to his advanced age, are wanted in the other, it seems as if the 31st psalm (written probably during the persecution of Saul) was taken and adapted, by a little alteration and addition, to his latter afflictions." — *Illustrated Commentary upon the Bible*.

<sup>101</sup> In the Hebrew it is, "Be thou to me for a rock of habitation." But instead of *maon*, "habitation," many of Dr Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS. have *maoz*, "munition," or "defense." "Be thou my rock of defence."



*to save me*, is resolved by some interpreters into the optative mood; as if David requested that he might be committed to the guardianship of angels. But it is better to retain the past tense of the verb, and to understand him as encouraging himself, from his experience in times past, to hope for a happy issue to his present calamities. Nor is there any necessity for limiting to the angels the verb, *thou hast given commandment*. God, no doubt, employs them in defending his people; but as he is possessed of innumerable ways of saving them, the expression, I conceive, is used indefinitely, to teach us that he gives commandment concerning the salvation of his servants, according as he has purposed, whenever he gives some manifest token of his favor toward them in his providence; and what he has determined in his own mind, he executes sometimes by his nod alone, and sometimes by the instrumentality of men or other creatures. Meanwhile, David would intimate that such is the all-sufficient power of God intrinsically considered, that without having recourse to any foreign aid, his commandment alone is abundantly adequate for effecting our salvation.

**4.** *O my God! deliver me from the hand of the wicked man.* Here he uses the singular number; but he is not to be understood as indicating one man only.<sup>102</sup> It is highly probable that he comprehends the whole host of the enemies who assaulted him. We have elsewhere had occasion to observe how greatly it contributes to inspire us with the confidence of obtaining our requests, when we are so assured of our own integrity, as to be able freely to complain before God that we are unjustly and wickedly assaulted by our enemies; for we ought not to doubt that God, who has promised to become the defender of those who are unjustly oppressed, will, in that case, undertake our cause.

### Psalm 71:5-8

**5.** For thou art my expectation, [or hope,] O Lord Jehovah! My trust from my youth. **6.** Upon thee have I leaned [or have I been sustained] from the womb:<sup>103</sup> thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise is continually of thee. **7.** I have been as a prodigy to the great ones,<sup>104</sup> and yet<sup>105</sup> thou art my strong confidence. **8.** My mouth shall be filled with thy praise and with thy glory daily.

**5.** *For thou art my expectation, O Lord Jehovah!* The Psalmist here repeats what he had said a little before concerning his trust or confidence. But some, perhaps, may be inclined to refer this sentence rather to the matter or ground afforded him for hope and confidence than to the emotions of his heart; supposing him to mean, that by the benefits which God had conferred upon him, he

<sup>102</sup> At the same time, it may be observed, that if this psalm was written during the rebellion of Absalom, this cruel son or Achitophel may be the person whom David has here in his eye, and describes in the singular number. If he refers to his own son, how deep must have been his agony of soul to be under the necessity of appealing to God in his present distressing circumstances, against an unnatural and wicked child, around whom all the affections of his heart were intertwined! What Calvin renders, in the last clause of the verse, "the violent man," is literally "leavened man." Leaven seems to be an image for deep and inveterate depravity of any kind. "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees," said our Lord. — (Matthew 16:6; see also 1 Corinthians 5:8.)

<sup>103</sup> "Des le ventre *de ma mere.*" — *Fr* "From the womb of my mother."

<sup>104</sup> "Ou, a plusieurs." — *Fr marg* "Or, to many."

<sup>105</sup> "Et toutesfois." — *Fr*

was furnished with well-grounded hope. And certainly he does not here simply declare that he hoped in God, but with this he conjoins experience, and acknowledges that even from his youth he had received tokens of the Divine favor, from which he might learn, that confidence is to be reposed in God alone. By adverting to what God had done for him,<sup>106</sup> he expresses the real cause of faith, (if I may so speak;) and from this we may easily perceive the powerful influence which the remembrance of God's benefits had in nourishing his hope.

6. *Upon thee have I been sustained from the womb.* This verse corresponds with the preceding, except that David proceeds farther. He not only celebrates the goodness of God which he had experienced from his childhood, but also those proofs of it which he had received previous to his birth. An almost similar confession is contained in Psalm 22:9, 10, by which is magnified the wonderful power and inestimable goodness of God in the generation of men, the way and manner of which would be altogether incredible, were it not a fact with which we are quite familiar. If we are astonished at that part of the history of the flood, in which Moses declares (Genesis 8:13) that Noah and his household lived ten months amidst the offensive nuisance produced by so many living creatures, when he could not draw the breath of life, have we not equal reason to marvel that the infant, shut up within its mother's womb, can live in such a condition as would suffocate the strongest man in half an hour? But we thus see how little account we make of the miracles which God works, in consequence of our familiarity with them. The Spirit, therefore, justly rebukes this ingratitude, by commending to our consideration this memorable instance of the grace of God, which is exhibited in our birth and generation. When we are born into the world, although the mother do her office, and the midwife may be present with her, and many others may lend their help, yet did not God, putting, so to speak, his hand under us, receive us into his bosom, what would become of us? and what hope would there be of the continuance of our life? Yea, rather, were it not for this, our very birth would be an entrance into a thousand deaths. God, therefore, is with the highest propriety said *to take us out of our mother's bowels* To this corresponds the concluding part of the verse, *My praise is continually of thee*; by which the Psalmist means that he had been furnished with matter for praising God without intermission.

7. *I have been as a prodigy to the great ones.* He now makes a transition to the language of complaint, declaring that he was held in almost universal abhorrence by reason of the great calamities with which he was afflicted. There is an apparent, although only an apparent, discrepancy between these two statements; first, that he had always been crowned with the benefits of God; and, secondly, that he was accounted as a prodigy on account of his great afflictions; but we may draw from thence the very profitable doctrine, that he was not so overwhelmed by his calamities, heavy though they were, as to be insensible to the goodness of God which he had experienced. Although, therefore, he saw that he was an object of detestation, yet the remembrance of the blessings which God had conferred upon him, could not be extinguished by the deepest shades of darkness which surrounded him, but served as a lamp in his heart to direct his faith. By the term *prodigy*<sup>107</sup> is expressed no

<sup>106</sup> In the Latin version it is, "Ab affectu ipso;" which is probably a mistake for "Ab effectu ipso." In the French version it is, "Par l'effet mesme."

<sup>107</sup> Green reads, "I am become a gazing-stock to the multitude." Horsley, "'I am become a prodigious sight to the many.' A *prodigious sight*, 'a sign which shall be spoken against,' Luke 2:34." "'I am become, as it were, a portentous sign unto many.' Many are willing to persuade themselves that my trials proceed directly from God's wrath, and are intended to warn them against pursuing a like course of conduct." — *French and Skinner* "A *monster*, i e., the supposed object of God's signal displeasure. Comp. Isaiah 20:3; Ezekiel 12:6; 24:24, 27." — *Cresswell* But others suppose that , *hemopheth*, as a *prodigy*, implies that

ordinary calamity. Had he not been afflicted in a strange and unusual manner, those to whom the miserable condition of mankind was not unknown would not have shrunk from him with such horror, and regarded him as so repulsive a spectacle. It was, therefore, a higher and more commendable proof of his constancy, that his spirit was neither broken nor enfeebled with sham but reposed in God with the stronger confidence, the more he was cast off by the world. The sentence is to be explained adversatively, implying that, *although* men abhorred him as a monster, yet, by leaning upon God, he continued in despite of all this unmoved. If it should be thought preferable to translate the word *rabbim*, which I have rendered *great ones*, by the word *many*, the sense will be, That David's afflictions were generally known, and had acquired great notoriety, as if he had been brought forth upon a stage and exposed to the view of the whole people. But in my opinion it will be more suitable to understand the word of *great men*, or *the nobles*. There is no heart so strong and impervious to outward influences as not to be deeply pierced when those who are considered to excel in wisdom and judgment, and who are invested with authority, treat a suffering and an afflicted man with such indignity, that they shrink with horror from him, as if he were a monster. In the next verse, as if he had obtained the desire of his heart, he expresses it to be his resolution to yield a grateful acknowledgement to God. To encourage himself to hope with the greater confidence for a happy issue to his present troubles, he promises loudly to celebrate the praises of God, and to do this not only on one occasion, but to persevere in the exercise without intermission.

### Psalm 71:9-13

**9.** Cast me not off in the time of my old age: forsake me not in the declining of my strength. **10.** For my enemies have said of me, and those who watch for my life have taken counsel together, **11.** Saying, God hath forsaken him; follow after him, and ye shall take him: for there is none to deliver him. **12.** O God! be not far from me: my God: hasten to my aid. **13.** Let those who are enemies to my life be confounded<sup>108</sup> and fail: let those who seek my hurt be covered with reproach and shame.

**9.** *Cast me not off in the time of my old age.* David having just now declared that God had been the protector of his life at his birth, and afterwards his foster-father in his childhood, and the guardian of his welfare during the whole course of his past existence; being now worn out with age, casts himself anew into the fatherly bosom of God. In proportion as our strength fails us — and then necessity itself impels us to seek God — in the same proportion should our hope in the willingness and readiness of God to succor us become strong. David's prayer, in short, amounts to this: "Do thou, O Lord, who hast sustained me vigorous and strong in the flower of my youth, not forsake

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the great and many dangers to which he had been exposed, and the extraordinary deliverances from them which he had experienced, marked him out as an object of wonder, so that men looked upon him as if he were exempted from the common lot of mankind, as if he possessed a charmed life, and were invulnerable to all assaults; and the second member of the verse has been viewed as the reason why he was so regarded: "for thou art my strong refuge."

<sup>108</sup> Others read, "Those who are enemies to my life shall be confounded," etc., understanding the words to be prophetic denunciations.

me now, when I am decayed and almost withered, but the more I stand in need of thy help, let the decrepitude and infirmities of age move thee to compassionate me the more.” From this verse expositors, not without good reason, conclude that the conspiracy of Absalom is the subject treated of in this psalm. And certainly it was a horrible and tragical spectacle, which tended to lead, not only the common people, but also those who excelled in authority, to turn away their eyes from him, as they would from a detestable monster, when the son, having driven his father from the kingdom, pursued him even through the very deserts to put him to death.

**10.** *For my enemies have said of me, etc.* He pleads, as an argument with God to show him mercy, the additional circumstance, that the wicked took greater license in cruelly persecuting him, from the belief which they entertained that he was rejected and abandoned of God. The basest of men, as we all know, become more bold and audacious, when, in tormenting the innocent, they imagine that this is a matter in which they have not to deal with God at all. Not only are they encouraged by the hope of escaping unpunished; but they also boast that all comes to pass according to their wishes, when no obstacle presents itself to restrain their wicked desires. What happened to David at that time is almost the ordinary experience of the children of God; namely, that the wicked, when once they come to believe that it is by the will of God that his people are exposed to them for a prey, give themselves uncontrolled license in doing them mischief. Measuring the favor of God only by what is the present condition of men, they conceive that all whom he suffers to be afflicted are despised, forsaken, and cast off by him. Such being their persuasion, they encourage and stimulate one another to practice every thing harassing and injurious against them, as persons who have none to undertake and avenge their cause. But this wanton and insulting<sup>109</sup> procedure on their part ought to encourage our hearts, since the glory of God requires that the promises which he has so frequently made of succouring the poor and afflicted should be actually performed. The ungodly may flatter themselves with the hope of obtaining pardon from him; but this foolish imagination does not by any means lessen the criminality of their conduct. On the contrary, they do a double injury to God, by taking away from him that which especially belongs to him.

**12.** *O God! be not far from me.* It is scarcely possible to express how severe and hard a temptation it was to David, when he knew that the wicked entertained the persuasion that he was rejected of God. They did not without consideration circulate this report; but after having seemed wisely to weigh all circumstances, they gave their judgment on the point as of a thing which was placed beyond all dispute. It was therefore an evidence of heroic fortitude on the part of David,<sup>110</sup> thus to rise superior to their perverse judgments, and, in the face of them all, to assure himself that God would be gracious to him, and to betake himself familiarly to him. Nor is it to be doubted that, in calling God *his God*, he makes use of this as a means of defending himself from this hard and grievous assault.

While invoking the aid of God, he at the same time prays (verse 13) that his enemies may be filled with shame until they be consumed. These words, however, may not improperly be read in the future tense; for it is frequently the practice of David, after having ended his prayer, to rise up against his enemies, and, as it were, to triumph over them. But I have followed that which seems more agreeable to the scope of the passage. Having had occasion elsewhere to explain this imprecation, it is unnecessary for me to repeat, in this place, what I have previously said.

<sup>109</sup> “Atqui proterva haec eorum insultatio.” — *Lat.* “Mais cest enrage desdain et outrage.” — *Fr.*

<sup>110</sup> “Parquoy c’a este une vertu a David plus qu’humaine.” — *Fr.* “It was therefore fortitude more than human for David.”

## Psalm 71:14-16

**14.** But I will hope continually, and will add <sup>111</sup> to all thy praise. **15.** My mouth shall recount thy righteousness and thy salvation daily; for I know not the number thereof. **16.** I will go in the strengths of the Lord Jehovah! I will make mention of thy righteousness only.

**14.** *But I will hope continually.* David again, as having obtained the victory, prepares himself for thanksgiving. There is, however, no doubt, that during the time when the wicked derided his simplicity, he struggled manfully amidst his distresses, as may be gathered from the word *hope*. Although, to outward appearance, there was no prospect of deliverance from his troubles, and although the wicked ceased not proudly to pour contempt upon his trust in God, he nevertheless determined to persevere in the exercise of hope; even as it is a genuine proof of faith, to look exclusively to the Divine promise, in order to be guided by its light alone amidst the thickest darkness of afflictions. The strength, then, of the hope of which David speaks, is to be estimated by the conflicts which he at that time sustained. In saying, *I will add to all thy praises*, he shows the confidence with which he anticipated a desirable escape from his troubles. It is as if he had said — Lord, I have been long accustomed to receive benefits from thee, and this fresh accession to them, I doubt not, will furnish me with new matter for celebrating thy grace.

**15.** *My mouth shall recount thy righteousness* Here he expresses more clearly what sacrifice of praise he resolved to present to God, promising to proclaim continually his righteousness and salvation. I have often before had occasion to observe, that *the righteousness of God* does not mean that property of his nature by which he renders to every man his own, but the faithfulness which he observes towards his own people, when he cherishes, defends, and delivers them. Hence the inestimable consolation which arises from learning that our salvation is so inseparably linked with the righteousness of God, as to have the same stability with this Divine attribute. *The salvation of God*, it is very evident, is taken in this place actively. The Psalmist connects this salvation with righteousness, as the effect with the cause; for his confident persuasion of obtaining salvation proceeded solely from reflecting that God is righteous, and that he cannot deny himself. As he had been saved so often, and in so many different ways, and so wonderfully, he engages to apply himself continually to the celebration of the grace of God. The particle *ki*, which we have translated *for*, is by some rendered adversatively *although*, and explained in this way: Although the salvation of God is to me incomprehensible, and transcends my capacity, yet I will recount it. But the proper signification of the word is more suitable in this place, there being nothing which ought to be more effectual in kindling and exciting our hearts to sing the praises of God, than the innumerable benefits which he has bestowed upon us. Although our hearts may not be affected from having experienced only one or two of the Divine benefits; although they may remain cold and unmoved by a small number of them, yet our ingratitude is inexcusable, if we are not awakened from our torpor and indifference when an innumerable multitude of them are lavished upon us. Let us learn then not to taste of the goodness of God slightly, and, as it were, with loathing, but to apply all our faculties to it in all its amplitude, that it may ravish us with admiration. It is surprising that the authors of

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<sup>111</sup> Horsley reads, “‘I shall be added,’ or ‘made an addition;’ literally, ‘be-made-to-be-added to the sum of thy praise.’” “The sense is,” says he, “that the mercies to the Psalmist would furnish the servants of God with a new topic of praise and thanksgiving.”

the Greek version ever thought of translating this clause, *I have not known learning*,<sup>112</sup> an error unworthy of being noticed, were it not that some fanatics in former times, to flatter themselves in their ignorance, boasted that, after the example of David, all learning and liberal sciences should be despised; even as, in the present day, the Anabaptists have no other pretext for boasting of being spiritual persons, but that they are grossly ignorant<sup>113</sup> of all science.

**16.** *I will go in the strength of the Lord Jehovah!* This may also very properly be translated, *I will go into the strengths*; and this interpretation is not less probable than the other. As fear and sorrow take possession of our minds in the time of danger, from our not reflecting with that deep and earnest attention which becomes us upon the power of God; so the only remedy for alleviating our sorrow in our afflictions is to enter into God's strengths, that they may surround and defend us on all sides. But the other reading, which is more generally received, I have thought proper to retain, because it also is very suitable, although interpreters differ as to its meaning. Some explain it, I will go forth to battle depending upon the power of God. But this is too restricted. *To go* is equivalent to abiding in a steady, settled, and permanent state. True believers, it must indeed be granted, so far from putting forth their energies without difficulty, and flying with alacrity in their heavenly course, rather groan through weariness; but as they surmount with invincible courage all obstacles and difficulties, not drawing back, or declining from the right way, or at least not failing through despair, they are on this account said to go forward until they have arrived at the termination of their course. In short, David boasts that he will never be disappointed of the help of God till he reach the mark. And because nothing is more rare or difficult in the present state of weakness and infirmity than to continue persevering, he collects all his thoughts in order to rely with entire confidence exclusively on the righteousness of God. When he says that he will be mindful of *it ONLY*, the meaning is, that, forsaking all corrupt confidences with which almost the whole world is driven about, he will depend wholly upon the protection of God, not allowing himself to wander after his own imaginations, or to be drawn hither and thither by surrounding objects.

Augustine quotes this text more than a hundred times as an argument to overthrow the merit of works, and plausibly opposes the righteousness which God gratuitously bestows to the meritorious righteousness of men. It must, however, be confessed that he wrests the words of David, and puts a sense upon them foreign to their genuine meaning, which simply is, that he does not rely upon his own wisdom, nor upon his own skill, nor upon his own strength, nor upon any riches which he

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<sup>112</sup> The present reading of the Septuagint is, Οὐκ ἔγνων πραγματείας, "I know not the affairs of men;" but Nobilius, in his Notes on the Septuagint, observes, that in some Greek copies it is, γραμματείας, "learning," of which reading Augustine makes mention; and as the Vulgate reads, "literaturam," "learning," this makes it more probable that the ancient reading of the LXX. was not πραγματείας, but γραμματείας. Horsley has followed the LXX. He considers this clause as the commencement of a new sentence, and connects it with the 16th verse thus: —

"Although I am no proficient in learning;  
I will enter upon [the subject of] the Lord Jehovah's great might;  
I will commemorate thy righteousness."

In a foot-note he refers to John 7:15, "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" and to Matthew 13:54, 56; and in an additional note he says, "It is strange that Houbigant should treat an interpretation with contempt, which is supported by the versions of the LXX., Jerome, and the Vulgate; which the Hebrew words will naturally bear, and which gives great spirit to the sentiment." Street reads: —

"Though I am ignorant of books,  
I will proceed with strength," etc.;

and observes, that "The word signifies *number*, but , signifies *an epistle, a book*."

<sup>113</sup> "Expertes." — *Lat.* "Gros asniers. — *Fr.*

possessed, as a ground for entertaining the confident hope of salvation, but that the only ground upon which he rests this hope is, that as God is righteous, it is impossible for God to forsake him. *The righteousness of God*, as we have just now observed, does not here denote that free gift by which he reconciles men to himself, or by which he regenerates them to newness of life; but his faithfulness in keeping his promises, by which he means to show that he is righteous, upright, and true towards his servants. Now, the Psalmist declares that the righteousness of God alone will be continually before his eyes, and in his memory; for unless we keep our minds fixed upon this alone, Satan, who is possessed of wonderful means by which to allure, will succeed in leading us astray after vanity. As soon as hopes from different quarters begin to insinuate themselves into our minds, there is nothing of which we are more in danger than of falling away. And whoever, not content with the grace of God alone, seeks elsewhere for the least succor, will assuredly fall, and thereby serve as an example to teach others how vain it is to attempt to mingle the stays of the world with the help of God. If David, in regard to his mere external condition in life, could remain stable and secure only by renouncing all other confidences, and casting himself upon the righteousness of God; what stability, I pray you to consider, are we likely to have, when the reference is to the spiritual and everlasting life, if we fall away, let it be never so little, from our dependence upon the grace of God? It is, therefore, undeniable that the doctrine invented by the Papists, which divides the work of perseverance in holiness between man's free will and God's grace,<sup>114</sup> precipitates wretched souls into destruction.

### Psalm 71:17-19

**17.** O God! thou hast taught me from my youth; and hitherto will I announce thy wondrous works. **18.** And still, O God! when I am old and grey-headed, forsake me not, until I declare thy strength to the generation, and thy power to all who are to come. **19.** And thy righteousness, O God! Is very high: for thou hast done great things: O God! who is like thee?

**17.** *O God! thou hast taught me from my youth.* The Psalmist again declares the great obligations under which he lay to God for his goodness, not only with the view of encouraging himself to gratitude, but also of exciting himself to continue cherishing hope for the time to come: which will appear from the following verse. Besides, since God teaches us both by words and deeds, it is certain that the second species of teaching is here referred to, the idea conveyed being, that David had learned by continual experience, even from his infancy, that nothing is better than to lean exclusively upon the true God. That he may never be deprived of this practical truth, he testifies that he had made great proficiency in it. When he promises to become a publisher of God's wondrous works, his object in coming under this engagement is, that by his ingratitude he may not interrupt the course of the Divine beneficence.

Upon the truth here stated, he rests the prayer which he presents in the 18th verse, that he may not be forgotten in his old age. His reasoning is this: Since thou, O God! hast from the

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<sup>114</sup> That is, which represents this work as performed, partly by God, and partly by a power which man has in himself underived from God.

commencement of my existence given me such abundant proofs of thy goodness, wilt thou not stretch forth thy hand to succor me, when now thou seest me decaying through the influence of old age? And, indeed, the conclusion is altogether inevitable, that as God vouchsafed to love us when we were infants, and embraced us with his favor when we were children, and has continued without intermission to do us good during the whole course of our life, he cannot but persevere in acting toward us in the same way even to the end. Accordingly, the participle *gam*, which we have translated *still*, here signifies *therefore*; it being David's design, from the consideration that the goodness of God can never be exhausted, and that he is not mutable like men, to draw the inference that he will be the same towards his people in their old age, that he was towards them in their childhood. He next supports his prayer by another argument, which is, that if he should fail or faint in his old age, the grace of God, by which he had been hitherto sustained, would at the same time soon be lost sight of. If God were immediately to withdraw his grace from us after we have but just tasted it slightly, it would speedily vanish from our memory. In like manner, were he to forsake us at the close of our life, after having conferred upon us many benefits during the previous part of it, his liberality by this means would be divested of much of its interest and attraction. David therefore beseeches God to assist him even to the end, that he may be able to commend to posterity the unintermitted course of the Divine goodness, and to bear testimony, even at his very death, that God never disappoints the faithful who betake themselves to him. By *the generation and those who are to come*, he means the children and the children's children to whom the memorial of the loving-kindness of God cannot be transmitted unless it be perfect in all respects, and has completed its course. He mentions *strength and power* as the effects of God's righteousness. He is, however, to be understood by the way as eulogising by these titles the manner of his deliverance, in which he congratulates himself; as if he had said, that God, in the way in which it was accomplished, afforded a manifestation of matchless and all-sufficient power.

**19.** *And thy righteousness, O God! is very high.*<sup>115</sup> Some connect this verse with the preceding, and repeating the verb *I will declare*, as common to both verses, translate, *And I will declare thy righteousness, O God!* But this being a matter of small importance, I will not dwell upon it. David prosecutes at greater length the subject of which he had previously spoken. In the first place, he declares that *the righteousness of God is very high*; secondly, that it wrought mightily; and, finally, he exclaims in admiration, *Who is like thee?* It is worthy of notice, that the righteousness of God, the effects of which are near to us and conspicuous, is yet placed on high, inasmuch as it cannot be comprehended by our finite understanding. Whilst we measure it according to our own limited standard, we are overwhelmed and swallowed up by the smallest temptation. In order, therefore, to give it free course to save us, it behoves us to take a large and a comprehensive view — to look above and beneath, far and wide, that we may form some due conceptions of its amplitude. The same remarks apply to the second clause, which makes mention of the works of God: *For thou hast done great things.* If we attribute to his known power the praise which is due to it, we will never want ground for entertaining good hope. Finally, our sense of the goodness of God should extend so far as to ravish us with admiration; for thus it will come to pass that our minds, which are often distracted by an unholy disquietude, will repose upon God alone. If any temptation thrusts itself

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<sup>115</sup> "Usque in excelsum." — Lat "Est eslevee jusques en haut." — Fr. " , *ad marom* — is up to the exalted place, — reaches up to heaven The mercy of God fills all *space* and *place* It crowns in the heavens what it governed upon earth." — Dr Adam Clarke



upon us, we immediately magnify a fly into an elephant; or rather, we rear very high mountains, which keep the hand of God from reaching us; and at the same time we basely limit the power of God. The exclamation of David, then, *Who is like thee?* tends to teach us the lesson, that we should force our way through every impediment by faith, and regard the power of God, which is well entitled to be so regarded, as superior to all obstacles. All men, indeed, confess with the mouth, that none is like God; but there is scarce one out of a hundred who is truly and fully persuaded that He alone is sufficient to save us.

### Psalm 71:20-24

**20.** Thou hast made me to see great and sore troubles, but turning, thou wilt quicken me, and turning <sup>116</sup> thou wilt lift me up from the deep places of the earth. <sup>117</sup> **21.** Thou wilt multiply my greatness; and turning, thou wilt comfort me. **22.** I will also, O my God: praise thee, for thy truth, with the psaltery; I will sing to thee with the harp, O Holy One of Israel! **23.** My lips shall rejoice when I sing to thee; and my soul, which thou hast redeemed. **24.** My tongue also shall daily declare thy righteousness: for they who seek my hurt are confounded and brought to shame.

**20.** *Thou hast made me to see great and sore troubles.* The verb *to see* among the Hebrews, as is well known, is applied to the other senses also. Accordingly, when David complains that calamities had been *shown* to him, he means that he had suffered them. And as he attributes to God the praise of the deliverances which he had obtained, so he, on the other hand, acknowledges that whatever adversities he had endured were inflicted on him according to the counsel and will of God. But we must first consider the object which David has in view, which is to render by comparison the grace of God the more illustrious, in the way of recounting how hardly he had been dealt with. Had he always enjoyed a uniform course of prosperity, he would no doubt have had good reason to rejoice; but in that case he would not have experienced what it is to be delivered from destruction by the stupendous power of God. We must be brought down even to the gates of death before God can be seen to be our deliverer. As we are born without thought and understanding, our minds, during the earlier part of our life, are not sufficiently impressed with a sense of the Author of our existence; but when God comes to our help, as we are lying in a state of despair, this resurrection is to us a bright mirror from which is seen reflected his grace. In this way David amplifies the goodness of God, declaring, that though plunged in a bottomless abyss, he was nevertheless drawn out by the divine hand, and restored to the light. And he boasts not only of having been preserved perfectly safe by the grace of God, but of having also been advanced to higher honor — a change which was, as it were, the crowning of his restoration, and was as if he had been lifted out of hell, even up to heaven. What he repeats the third time, with respect to *God's turning*, goes to the commendation of Divine Providence; the idea which he intends to be conveyed being, that no adversity happened to him by chance, as was evident from the fact that his condition was reversed as soon as the favor of God shone upon him.

<sup>116</sup> “Et to retournant, estant appaise.” — *Fr.* “And returning, being appeased.”

<sup>117</sup> “*The depths of the earth*, expressive of the lowest state of misery and suffering.” — *Hewlett.*

**22.** *I will also, O my God! praise thee.* He again breaks forth into thanksgiving; for he was aware that the design of God, in so liberally succouring his servants, is, that his goodness may be celebrated. In speaking of employing *the psalter* and *the harp* in this exercise, he alludes to the generally prevailing custom of that time. To sing the praises of God upon the harp and psalter unquestionably formed a part of the training of the law, and of the service of God under that dispensation of shadows and figures; but they are not now to be used in public thanksgiving. We are not, indeed, forbidden to use, in private, musical instruments, but they are banished out of the churches by the plain command of the Holy Spirit, when Paul, in 1 Corinthians 14:13, lays it down as an invariable rule, that we must praise God, and pray to him only in a known tongue. By the word *truth*, the Psalmist means that the hope which he reposed in God was rewarded, when God preserved him in the midst of dangers. The promises of God, and his truth in performing them, are inseparably joined together. Unless we depend upon the word of God, all the benefits which he confers upon us will be unsavoury or tasteless to us; nor will we ever be stirred up either to prayer or thanksgiving, if we are not previously illuminated by the Divine word. So much the more revolting, then, is the folly of that diabolical man, Servetus, who teaches that the rule of praying is perverted, if faith is fixed upon the promises; as if we could have any access into the presence of God, until he first invited us by his own voice to come to him.

**23.** *My lips shall rejoice*<sup>118</sup> *when I sing to thee.* In this verse David expresses more distinctly his resolution not to give thanks to God hypocritically, nor in a superficial manner, but to engage with unfeigned earnestness in this religious exercise. By the figures which he introduces, he briefly teaches us, that to praise God would be the source of his greatest pleasure; and thus he indirectly censures the profane mirth of those who, forgetting God, confine their congratulations to themselves in their prosperity. The scope of the last verse is to the same effect, implying that no joy would be sweet and desirable to him, but such as was connected with the praises of God, and that to celebrate his Redeemer's praises would afford him the greatest satisfaction and delight.

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<sup>118</sup> “The original word expresses a brisk, vibratory motion, like that of the lips in singing a lively air, or of the feet in dancing. Hence, figuratively, it signifies *to rejoice* or *exult*. In this passage, it may be understood literally of *the lips*, and figuratively of the soul. And the English language having no corresponding verb which may be taken literally in reference to one subject, and figuratively in reference to another, it might be better to express its sense in connection with each, by two different verbs, thus:

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 “My lips shall move briskly, when I sing unto thee,  
 And my soul shall rejoice, which thou, etc.”

— Horsley.

## PSALM 72

David in this psalm prays to God, in the name of the whole Church, for the continual prosperity of the kingdom which was promised him, and teaches us at the same time, that the true happiness of the godly consists in their being placed under the government of a king who was raised to the throne by the appointment of heaven.

### ¶ *Of Solomon.* <sup>119</sup>

From the inscription of this psalm we cannot determine who was its author. As it is expressly said at the close to be the last of David's prayers, it is more probable that it was composed by him than by Solomon, his successor. <sup>120</sup> It may, however, be conjectured that Solomon reduced the prayer of his father into poetical measure, to make it more generally known, and to bring it more extensively into use among the people, — a conjecture which is not improbable. But as the letter , *lamed*, has many significations in Hebrew, it may be explained as denoting that this psalm was composed for or in behalf of Solomon. If this is admitted, it is to be observed, that under the person of one man there is comprehended the state of the kingdom through successive ages. After having carefully weighed the whole matter, I am disposed to acquiesce in the conjecture, that the prayers to which David gave utterance on his death-bed were reduced by his son into the form of a psalm, with the view of their being kept in everlasting remembrance. To indicate the great importance of this prayer, and to induce the faithful with the greater earnestness to unite their prayers with the memorable prayer of this holy king, it is expressly added, that this is the last which he poured forth. As Solomon did nothing more than throw into the style of poetry the matter to which his father gave expression, David is to be considered as the principal author of this inspired composition. Those who would interpret it simply as a prophecy of the kingdom of Christ, seem to put a construction upon the words which does violence to them; and then we must always beware of giving the Jews occasion of making an outcry, as if it were our purpose, sophistically, to apply to Christ those things which do not directly refer to him. But as David, who was anointed king by the commandment of God, knew that the terms upon which he and his posterity possessed the kingdom were, that the power and dominion should at length come to Christ; and as he farther knew that the temporal well-being of the people was, for the time, comprehended in this kingdom, as held by him and his posterity, and that from it, which was only a type or shadow, there should at length proceed something far superior — that is, spiritual and everlasting felicity; knowing, as he did, all this, he justly made the perpetual duration of this kingdom the object of his most intense solicitude, and prayed with the deepest earnestness in its behalf, — reiterating his prayer in his last moments, with the view of distinctly testifying, that of all his cares this was the greatest. What is here spoken of everlasting dominion cannot be limited to one man, or to a few, nor even to twenty ages; but there is pointed out the succession which had its end and its complete accomplishment in Christ.

<sup>119</sup> “Ou, pour Solomon.” — *Fr marg* “Or, for Solomon.” The prefix , *lamed*, may be rendered either *of* or *for*

<sup>120</sup> To this it may be added, as Dathe observes, that “Solomon could not, without the imputation of vanity, have predicted in such strains the glory of his reign, the admiration with which he would be regarded by other nations, and the happiness of his subjects, arising from his prudence and virtue.” The same writer adds, “But while David, or the inspired author, whoever he was, predicted the prosperity of Solomon's reign, the promise given (2 Samuel 7) of that greatest and best of kings, who was afterwards to arise in the family of David, seems to have been brought before his mind. This is the reason that the description given is, in various respects, more suited to the reign of the Messiah than to the reign of Solomon.”

## Psalm 72:1-6

**1.** O God! give thy judgments to the king, and thy righteousness to the king's son. **2.** He shall judge thy people in righteousness, and thy poor ones in judgment. **3.** The mountains shall bring forth peace to the people, and the hills in righteousness. <sup>121</sup> **4.** He shall judge the poor of the people; he shall save the children of the afflicted; and shall break in pieces the calumniator. **5.** They shall fear thee with the sun; and generation of generations shall fear thee <sup>122</sup> in the presence of the moon. **6.** He shall descend as rain upon the mown grass; as the showers <sup>123</sup> which water the earth.

**1.** *O God! give thy judgments to the king.* <sup>124</sup> While David, to whom the promise had been made, at his death affectionately recommended to God his son, who was to succeed him in his kingdom, he doubtless entited to the Church a common form of prayer, that the faithful, convinced of the impossibility of being prosperous and happy, except under one head, should show all respect, and yield all obedience to this legitimate order of things, and also that from this typical kingdom they might be conducted to Christ. In short, this is a prayer that God would furnish the king whom he had chosen with the spirit of uprightness and wisdom. By the terms *righteousness and judgment*, the Psalmist means a due and well-regulated administration of government, which he opposes to the tyrannical and unbridled license of heathen kings, who, despising God, rule according to the dictates of their own will; and thus the holy king of Israel, who was anointed to his office by divine appointment, is distinguished from other earthly kings. From the words we learn by the way, that no government in the world can be rightly managed but under the conduct of God, and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If kings possessed in themselves resources sufficiently ample, it would have been to no purpose for David to have sought by prayer from another, that with which they were of themselves already provided. But in requesting that the righteousness and judgment of God may be given to kings, he reminds them that none are fit for occupying that exalted station, except in so far as they are formed for it by the hand of God. Accordingly, in the Proverbs of Solomon, (Proverbs 8:15.) Wisdom proclaims that kings reign by her. Nor is this to be wondered at, when we consider that civil government is so excellent an institution, that God would have us to acknowledge him as its author, and claims to himself the whole praise of it. But it is proper for us to descend from the general to the particular; for since it is the peculiar work of God to set up and to maintain a rightful government in the world, it was much more necessary for him to communicate the special grace of his Spirit for the maintenance and preservation of that sacred kingdom which he had chosen in preference to all others. By *the king's son* David no doubt means his successors. At the same time, he has an eye to this promise:

<sup>121</sup> In the Septuagint, *in righteousness* is connected with the following verse — In righteousness he shall judge the poor of the people," Dr Adam Clarke considers this to be the true division.

<sup>122</sup> "*Te craindra,*" "*shall fear thee,*" is a supplement in the French version. There is no supplement in the Latin version.

<sup>123</sup> "Comme les pluies drues et longues." — *Fr.* "As the plenteous and prolonged showers."

<sup>124</sup> "In other places, those events which God himself brings to pass in defending the righteous, and in punishing the wicked, are called *his judgments*, as in Psalm 36:7; but the statutes promulgated by God for the regulation of human conduct are also styled *his judgments*. In this sense, the judgments and laws of God may be considered as synonymous terms, Psalm 119. 20, 30, 39, 52, 75. The clause is justly explained by Jarchi: '*Knowledge of the judgments* — to wit, of the particular rules of right — *which thou hast commanded in the law.*' The explication given by Kimchi is suitable also: 'That he may not err in giving forth sentences, give him knowledge and understanding, that he may judge with judgment and justice.'" — *Rosenmüller on the Messianic Psalms, Biblical Cabinet*, volume 32, pp. 232, 233.

“Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne,”  
(Psalm 132:11.)

But no such stability as is indicated in that passage is to be found in the successors of David, till we come to Christ. We know that after the death of Solomon, the dignity of the kingdom decayed, and from that time its wealth became impaired, until, by the carrying of the people into captivity, and the ignominious death inflicted upon their king, the kingdom was involved in total ruin. And even after their return from Babylon, their restoration was not such as to inspire them with any great hope, until at length Christ sprung forth from the withered stock of Jesse. He therefore holds the first rank among the children of David.

2. *He shall judge thy people in righteousness.* Some read this in the form of a wish — *O that he may judge, etc.* Others retain the future tense; and thus it is a prophecy. But we will come nearer the correct interpretation by understanding something intermediate, as implied. All that is afterwards spoken, concerning the king, flows from the supposition, that the blessing prayed for in the first verse is conferred upon him — from the supposition that he is adorned with righteousness and judgment. The prayer, then, should be explained thus: Govern our king, O God! that he may judge. Or in this way, When thou shalt have bestowed upon the king thy righteousness, then he will judge uprightly. To govern a nation well, is an endowment far too excellent to grow out of the earth; but the spiritual government of Christ, by which all things are restored to perfect order, ought much more to be considered a gift of heaven. In the first clause of the verse, David speaks of the whole people in general. In the second clause, he expressly mentions *the poor*, who, on account of their poverty and weakness, have need of the help of others, and for whose sake kings are armed with the sword to grant them redress when unjustly oppressed. Hence, also, proceeds *peace*, of which mention is made in the third verse. The term *peace* being employed among the Hebrews to denote not only *rest* and *tranquillity*, but also *prosperity*, David teaches us that the people would enjoy prosperity and happiness, when the affairs of the nation were administered according to the principles of righteousness. *The bringing forth of peace* is a figurative expression taken from the fertility of the earth.<sup>125</sup> And when it is said that *the mountains and hills shall bring forth peace*,<sup>126</sup> the meaning is, that no corner would be found in the country in which it did not prevail, not even the most unpromising parts, indicated by the mountains, which are commonly barren, or at least do not produce so great an abundance of fruits as the valleys. Besides, both the word *peace* and the word *righteousness* are connected with each clause of the verse, and must be twice repeated,<sup>127</sup> the idea intended to be conveyed being, that peace by righteousness<sup>128</sup> should be diffused through every

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<sup>125</sup> As the earth brings forth fruits, so shall the mountains bring forth peace. The same figure is used in Psalm 85:12, where it is said, “Truth shall spring out of the earth.”

<sup>126</sup> Dathe and Boothroyd take another view. According to them, the allusion is to the custom which, in ancient times, prevailed in the East, of announcing good or bad news from the tops of mountains, or other eminences; by means of which, acts of justice were speedily communicated to the remotest part of the country. The same image is used in Isaiah 40:9.

<sup>127</sup> That is, we are to read thus: “The mountains shall bring forth peace to the people in righteousness; and the hills shall bring forth peace to the people in righteousness.”

<sup>128</sup> “Peace by righteousness.” Calvin considers the Psalmist as representing peace to be the native fruit or effect of righteousness. Such also is the interpretation of Rosenmüller: “‘And *the hills* shall bring forth peace with *justice*, or *because of justice*.’ *Justice* and *peace* are joined together, as cause and effect. When iniquity or injustice prevails, general misery is the consequence; and, on the contrary, the prevalence of justice is followed by general felicity. The sense of the clause is, — happiness shall reign throughout the land, for the people shall be governed with equity.”

part of the world. Some read simply *righteousness*, instead of *In righteousness*, supposing the letter *, beth*, to be here redundant, which does not, however, appear to be the case. <sup>129</sup>

**4. *He shall judge the poor of the people.*** The poet continues his description of the end and fruit of a righteous government, and unfolds at greater length what he had briefly touched upon concerning the afflicted among the people. But it is a truth which ought to be borne in mind, that kings can keep themselves within the bounds of justice and equity only by the grace of God; for when they are not governed by the Spirit of righteousness proceeding from heaven, their government is converted into a system of tyranny and robbery. As God had promised to extend his care to the poor and afflicted among his people, David, as an argument to enforce the prayer which he presents in behalf of the king, shows that the granting of it will tend to the comfort of the poor. God is indeed no respecter of persons; but it is not without cause that God takes a more special care of the poor than of others, since they are most exposed to injuries and violence. Let laws and the administration of justice be taken away, and the consequence will be, that the more powerful a man is, he will be the more able to oppress his poor brethren. David, therefore, particularly mentions that the king will be the defender of those who can only be safe under the protection of the magistrate, and declares that he will be their avenger when they are made the victims of injustice and wrong. The phrase, *The children of the afflicted*, is put for *the afflicted*, an idiom quite common in Hebrew, and a similar form of expression is sometimes used by the Greeks, as when they say *υἱοῦς ἰατρῶν*, *the sons of physicians*, for *physicians*. <sup>130</sup> But as the king cannot discharge the duty of succouring and defending the poor which David imposes upon him, unless he curb the wicked by authority and the power of the sword, it is very justly added in the end of the verse, that when righteousness reigns, *oppressors or extortioners will be broken in pieces*. It would be foolish to wait till they should give place of their own accord. They must be repressed by the sword, that their audacity and wickedness may be prevented from proceeding to greater lengths. It is therefore requisite for a king to be a man of wisdom, and resolutely prepared effectually to restrain the violent and injurious, that the rights of the meek and orderly may be preserved unimpaired. Thus none will be fit for governing a people but he who has learned to be rigorous when the case requires. Licentiousness must necessarily prevail under an effeminate and inactive sovereign, or even under one who is of a disposition too gentle and forbearing. There is much truth in the old saying, that it is worse to live under a prince through whose lenity everything is lawful, than under a tyrant where there is no liberty at all.

**5. *They shall fear thee with the sun*** If this is read as an apostrophe, or change of person, it may be properly and without violence understood of the king; implying, that the ornaments or distinctions which chiefly secure to a sovereign reverence from his subjects are his impartially securing to every man the possession of his own rights, and his manifesting a spirit of humanity ready at all times to succor the poor and miserable, as well as a spirit determined rigorously to subdue the audacity of the wicked. But it will be more appropriate, without changing the person, to explain it of God

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<sup>129</sup> Rosenmüller, in like manner, objects to this reading. "Some expositors," says he, "consider the prefix *, beth*, as redundant, or as denoting that the noun is in the accusative case; and that the clause may be rendered, *And the hills shall bring forth justice* Noldius, in his Concordance, adduces several passages as examples of a similar construction; but they appear, all of them, to be constructed on a different principle."

<sup>130</sup> Many examples of this Hebraism might be quoted. In Ecclesiastes 10:17, "a son of nobles" is put for "a noble person;" in Psalm 18:45, *children of the stranger*, for *strangers*; and, in many passages, *children*, or *sons of men*, for *men*, simply considered.

himself.<sup>131</sup> The preservation of mutual equity among men is an inestimable blessing; but the service of God is well worthy of being preferred even to this. David, therefore, very properly commends to us the blessed fruits of a holy and righteous government, by telling us that it will draw in its train true religion and the fear of God. And Paul, when enjoining us in 1 Timothy 2:2, to pray for kings, expressly mentions what we ought to have in view in our prayers, which is, “that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” As there is no small danger, were civil government overthrown, of religion being destroyed, and the worship of God annihilated, David beseeches God to have respect to his own name and glory in preserving the king. By this argument he at once reminds kings of their duty, and stirs up the people to prayer; for we cannot be better employed than in directing all our desires and prayers to the advancement of the service and honor of God. When we come to Christ, this is far more truly applicable to him, true religion being established in his kingdom and nowhere else. And certainly David, in describing the worship or service of God as continuing to the end of the world, intimates by the way that he ascends in thought to that everlasting kingdom which God had promised: *They shall fear thee with the sun; and generation of generations shall fear thee in the presence of the moon.*<sup>132</sup>

**6.** *He shall descend as the rain upon the mown grass.* This comparison may seem at first sight to be somewhat harsh; but it elegantly and appositely expresses the great advantage which is derived by all from the good and equitable constitution of a kingdom. Meadows, we know, are cut in the beginning of summer when the heat prevails; and did not the earth imbibe new moisture by the falling rain, even the very roots of the herbage would wither by reason of the barren and parched state of the soil. David, therefore, teaches us that as God defends the earth from the heat of the sun by watering it, so he in like manner provides for the welfare of his Church, and defends it under the government of the king. But this prediction has received its highest fulfillment in Christ, who, by distilling upon the Church his secret grace, renders her fruitful.

## Psalm 72:7-11

**7.** In his days shall the righteous flourish; and there shall be abundance of peace, so long as the moon endureth.<sup>133</sup> **8.** He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends

<sup>131</sup> “The poet in this clause addresses God; not the king, of whom he speaks always in the third person. The sense is, This king shall establish and preserve among his subjects the true religion, — the uncorrupted worship of God. Michaelis, on this passage, justly remarks that this could not, without extreme flattery, be predicated of Solomon.” — *Dathe*.

<sup>132</sup> “With the sun,” and “in the presence of the moon,” are Hebrew idioms, designating the eternity of the Messiah’s kingdom. “‘They shall venerate thee with the sun, and in presence of the moon;’ that is, as long as the sun shines, and is succeeded by the moon, or while the sun and moon continue to give light, — in a word, for ever. Compare verse seventh, where the same idea is expressed, only in a slightly different manner, — *until there be no moon* Psalm 89:37 — ‘His throne shall be as the sun before me, as the moon it shall be established for ever.’ The word *coram*, [translated *in presence of*,] in this passage, is to be understood in the same sense as in Genesis 11:28, *Mortuus est Haran*, — *coram facie* Terah; ‘And Haran died before the face of Terah,’ that is, while Terah still survived. Hence, in Psalm 102:28, where *coram te*, ‘before thee,’ is used in reference to God, — the Alexandrine version gives *εἰς αἰῶνας* ‘for ever.’ Here the sense is given in the words immediately following, *generatio generationum*, ‘a generation of generations’ shall venerate thee; — in other words, throughout all generations, or during a continual series of years, men shall celebrate thy happy and glorious reign.” — *Rosenmüller* Calvin also reads *γενεῶν*, “generation of generations,” in the nominative case. The translators of our English Bible supply the preposition *in*, *lamed*, thus making it, “throughout all generations.” But in either case the meaning is the same.

<sup>133</sup> Literally, “till there be no moon;” till the end of the world — for ever.

of the earth. **9.** The inhabitants of the desert shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. **10.** The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring a present: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall bring a gift to him. **11.** And all kings shall prostrate themselves before him; all nations shall serve him.

**7.** *In his days shall the righteous flourish* It is unnecessary for me frequently to repeat what I have once stated, that all these sentences depend upon the first verse. David, therefore, prayed that the king might be adorned with righteousness and judgment, that the just might flourish and the people prosper. This prediction receives its highest fulfillment in Christ. It was, indeed, the duty of Solomon to maintain the righteous; but it is the proper office of Christ to make men righteous. He not only gives to every man his own, but also reforms their hearts through the agency of his Spirit. By this means he brings righteousness back, as it were, from exile, which otherwise would be altogether banished from the world. Upon the return of righteousness there succeeds the blessing of God, by which he causes all his children to rejoice in the way of making them to perceive that under their King, Christ, every provision is made for their enjoying all manner of prosperity and felicity. If any would rather take the word *peace* in its proper and more restricted signification, I have no objections to it. And, certainly, to the consummation of a happy life, nothing is more desirable than peace; for amidst the turmoils and contentions of war, men derive almost no good from having an abundance of all things, as it is then wasted and destroyed. Moreover, when David represents the life of the king as prolonged to the end of the world, this shows more clearly that he not only comprehends his successors who occupied an earthly throne, but that he ascends even to Christ, who, by rising from the dead, obtained for himself celestial life and glory, that he might govern his Church for ever.

**8** *He shall have dominion from sea to sea.* As the Lord, when he promised his people the land of Canaan for an inheritance, assigned to it these four boundaries, (Genesis 15:18,) David intimates, that so long as the kingdom shall continue to exist, the possession of the promised land will be entire, to teach the faithful that the blessing of God cannot be fully realised, except whilst this kingdom shall flourish. He therefore declares that he will exercise dominion from the Red Sea, or from that arm of the Egyptian sea to the sea of Syria, which is called the Sea of the Philistines,<sup>134</sup> and also from the river Euphrates to the great wilderness. If it is objected that such narrow bounds do not correspond with the kingdom of Christ, which was to be extended from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof, we reply, that David obviously accommodates his language to his own time, the amplitude of the kingdom of Christ not having been, as yet, fully unfolded. He has therefore begun his description in phraseology well known, and in familiar use under the law and the prophets; and even Christ himself commenced his reign within the limits here marked out before he penetrated to the uttermost boundaries of the earth; as it is said in Psalm 110:2,

“The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion.”

But, soon after, the Psalmist proceeds to speak of the enlarged extent of the empire of this king, declaring that the kings beyond the sea shall also be tributaries to him; and also that the inhabitants of the desert shall receive his yoke. The word *tsiim*,<sup>135</sup> which we have translated *inhabitants of*

<sup>134</sup> Or the Mediterranean.

<sup>135</sup> *tsiim*, is from *tsiyah*, a dry and parched country, a desert Rosenmüller translates it, *the rude nations* “The word *tsiim*,” says he, “seems to signify rude, barbarous tribes; the inhabitants of desert places, — of vast and unknown regions. This sense



*the desert*, is, I have no doubt, to be understood of those who, dwelling towards the south, were at a great distance from the land of Canaan. The Prophet immediately adds, that *the enemies of the king shall lick the dust* in token of their reverence. This, as is well known, was in ancient times a customary ceremony among the nations of the East; and Alexander the Great, after he had conquered the East, wished to compel his subjects to practice it, from which arose great dissatisfaction and contentions, the Macedonians disdainfully refusing to yield such a slavish and degrading mark of subjection.<sup>136</sup> The meaning then is, that the king chosen by God in Judea will obtain so complete a victory over all his enemies, far and wide, that they shall come humbly to pay him homage.

**10.** *The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents.* The Psalmist still continues, as in the preceding verse, to speak of the extent of the kingdom. The Hebrews apply the appellation of *Tarshish* to the whole coast, which looks towards Cilicia. By *the isles*, therefore, is denoted the whole coast of the Mediterranean Sea, from Cilicia to Greece. As the Jews, contenting themselves with the commodities of their own country, did not undertake voyages to distant countries, like other nations; God having expressly required them to confine themselves within the limits of their own country, that they might not be corrupted by the manners of strangers; they were accustomed, in consequence of this, to apply the appellation of *isles* to those countries which were on the other side of the sea. I indeed admit that Cyprus, Crete, and other islands, are comprehended under this name; but I also maintain that it applies to all the territories which were situated beyond the Mediterranean Sea. By the words *minchah*, a present, and *eshcar*, a gift, must be understood any tribute or custom, and not voluntary offerings; for it is vanquished enemies, and the mark or token of their subjection, which are spoken of. These terms appear to be used intentionally in this place, in order to mitigate the odium attached to such a mark of subjugation;<sup>137</sup> as if the inspired writer indirectly reproved subjects, if they defrauded their kings of their revenues. By *Sheba*, some think Arabia is intended, and by *Seba*, Ethiopia. Some, however, by the first word understand all that part of the Gulf of Arabia which lies towards Africa; and by the second, which is written with the letter *samech*, the country of Sabea,<sup>138</sup> the more pleasant and fruitful country. This opinion is probably the more correct of the two. It is unnecessary here to remark how foolishly this passage has been wrested in the Church of Rome. They chant this verse as referring to the philosophers or wise men who came to worship Christ; as if, indeed, it were in their power of philosophers to make kings all upon a sudden; and in addition to this, to change the quarters of the world, to make of the east the south or the west.

**11.** *And all kings shall prostrate themselves before him.* This verse contains a more distinct statement of the truth, That the whole world will be brought in subjection to the authority of Christ. The kingdom of Judah was unquestionably never more flourishing than under the reign of Solomon;

appears to be most suitable, both here and in Psalm 74:14. Hence it is used Isaiah 13:21; 34:14; Jeremiah 50:39, for the animals, — the wild beasts that inhabit jungles and deserts.” The LXX. translate it Αἰθιοπες, “the Æthiopians;” and in like manner the Vulgate, Æthiopic, and Arabic versions. Boothroyd is of opinion that the wild Arabs may be intended.

<sup>136</sup> The kings of Persia never admitted any into their presence without exacting this act of adoration, and it was the Persian custom which Alexander wished to introduce among the Macedonians. — *Rollin’s Ancient History*, volume 4, p. 288. This custom is still extant among the Turks. As soon as an ambassador sees the Sultan, he falls on his knees and kisses the ground.

<sup>137</sup> *minchah*, properly signifies a friendly offering; and *eshcar*, a compensative present made on account of benefits received, — a gift which a person presents as a token of gratitude. — See Appendix.

<sup>138</sup> Supposed to be in Arabia Felix. “The Septuagint reads, ‘The kings of the Arabs, and Sabaeans, shall bring gifts.’ So that anciently, perhaps, Sheba was the general name of Arabia; and Seba, or Sabaea, was that particular province of it called Arabia Felix, lying to the South, between the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea.” — *Hewlett*.

but even then there were only a small number of kings who paid tribute to him, and what they paid was inconsiderable in amount; and, moreover, it was paid upon condition that they should be allowed to live in the enjoyment of liberty under their own laws. While David then began with his own son, and the posterity of his son, he rose by the Spirit of prophecy to the spiritual kingdom of Christ; a point worthy of our special notice, since it teaches us that we have not been called to the hope of everlasting salvation by chance, but because our heavenly Father had already destined to give us to his Son. From this we also learn, that in the Church and flock of Christ there is a place for kings; whom David does not here disarm of their sword nor despoil of their crown, in order to admit them into the Church, but rather declares that they will come with all the dignity of their station to prostrate themselves at the feet of Christ.

### Psalm 72:12-15

**12.** For he will deliver the poor when he crieth to him; and the afflicted person who hath none to succor him. **13.** He will have pity on the poor and indigent; and will save the souls [or lives] of the poor. **14.** He will redeem their souls from fraud and violence: and their blood will be precious in his sight. **15.** And he shall live; and there shall be given to him of the gold of Sheba; and prayer shall continually be made for him, and daily shall he be blessed.

**12.** *For he will deliver the poor when he crieth to him.* The Psalmist again affirms that the kingdom which he magnifies so greatly will not be tyrannical or cruel. The majority of kings, neglecting the well-being of the community, have their minds wholly engrossed with their own private interests. The consequence is, that they unmercifully oppress their miserable subjects; and it even happens that the more formidable any of them is, and the more absorbing his rapacity, he is accounted so much the more eminent and illustrious. But it is far different with the king here described. It has been held as a proverb by all mankind, “That there is nothing in which men approach nearer to God than by their beneficence;” and it would be very inconsistent did not this virtue shine forth in those kings whom God has more nearly linked to himself. Accordingly, David, to render the king beloved who was chosen of God, justly declares, not only that he will be the guardian of justice and equity, but also that he will be so humane and merciful, as to be ready to afford succor to the most despised; qualities too seldom to be found in sovereigns, who, dazzled with their own splendor, withdraw themselves to a distance from the poor and the afflicted, as if it were unworthy of, and far beneath, their royal dignity to make them the objects of their care. David avows that the blood of the common people, which is usually accounted vile and as a thing of nought, will be very precious in the estimation of this heavenly king. Constancy and magnanimity are denoted by the words *he will redeem*; for it would be far short of the duty of a king merely to hate fraud and extortion, did he not resolutely come forward to punish these crimes and set himself to defend those who are oppressed.<sup>139</sup> Under the terms *fraud* and *violence* is comprehended all kind of wrong-doing; for a man in working mischief is either a lion or a fox. Some rage with open

<sup>139</sup> “Si d’un grand coeur il ne se presentoit pour les punir et en faire la vengeance, et s’opposoit pour defendre ceux qu’on oppresse.” — *Fr.*

violence, and others proceed to wrong-doing insidiously and by secret arts. Moreover, we know that supreme sovereignty, both in heaven and earth, has been given to Christ, (Matthew 28:18,) that he may defend his people not only from all temporal dangers, but especially from all the harassing annoyances of Satan, until having delivered them at length from all trouble, he gather them into the everlasting rest of his heavenly kingdom.

**15.** *And he shall live.* To refer the word *live* to the poor, as some do, seems forced. What David affirms is, that this king shall be rewarded with long life, which is not the least of God's earthly blessings. The words which follow are to be read indefinitely, that is to say, without determining any particular person; <sup>140</sup> as if it had been said, The gold of Arabia shall be given him, and prayers shall everywhere be made for his prosperity. There is thus again a repetition of what had been previously said concerning his power; for if Arabia shall pay him tribute, how vast an amount of riches will be gathered from so many countries nearer home! Christ, it is true, does not reign to hoard up gold, but David meant to teach by this figure, that even the nations which were most remote would yield such homage to him, as to surrender to him themselves and all that they possessed. It is no uncommon thing for the glory of the spiritual kingdom of Christ to be portrayed under images of outward splendor. David, in conformity with this usual style of Scripture, has here foretold that the kingdom of Christ would be distinguished for its wealth; but this is to be understood as referring to its spiritual character. Whence it appears how wickedly and wantonly the Papists have perverted this passage, and made it subserve their purpose of raking to themselves the perishable riches of the world. Moreover, when he speaks of the common prayers of the people, by which they will commend the prosperity of the king to the care of God, he intimates that so well-pleased will they be with being his subjects, that they will account nothing so desirable as to yield entire submission to his authority. Many, no doubt, reject his yoke, and hypocrites fret and murmur secretly in their hearts, and would gladly extinguish all remembrance of Christ, were it in their power; but the affectionate interest here predicted is what all true believers are careful to cultivate, not only because to pray for earthly kings is a duty enjoined upon them in the Word of God, but also because they ought to feel a special desire and solicitude for the enlargement of the boundaries of this kingdom, in which both the majesty of God shines forth, and their own welfare and happiness are included. Accordingly, in Psalm 118:25, we will find a form of prayer dictated for the whole Church, That God would bless this king; not that Christ stands in need of our prayers, but because he justly requires from his servants this manifestation or proof of true piety; and by it they may also exercise themselves in praying for the coming of the kingdom of God.

## Psalm 72:16-20

<sup>140</sup> "C'est a dire, sans determiner quelque certaine personne." — *Fr.* In the Hebrew, the three last verbs of the verse are in the singular number, in the future of *kal* active, and there is no nominative with which they agree. Calvin translates them literally: "Et dabit ei de auro Seba: et orabit pro eo semper, quotidie benedicit eum;" "And shall give to him of the gold of Sheba, and shall pray for him continually, daily shall bless him." But, on the margin of the French version, he thus explains the construction: "C'est, on luy donnera, etc., on prierà, etc., on benira." "That is, the gold of Sheba shall be given to him, prayer shall be made for him continually, and daily shall he be blessed."

**16.** A handful of corn shall be in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall be shaken as of Lebanon: <sup>141</sup> and they shall go forth from the city as it were a plant of the earth. **17.** His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued in the presence of the sun: and all nations shall bless themselves in him, and shall call him blessed. **18.** Blessed be Jehovah God! the God of Israel! who alone doeth wonderful things. **19.** And blessed be his glorious name [literally, the name of his glory] for ever; and let all the earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and Amen. **20.** The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.

**16.** *A handful of corn shall be* <sup>142</sup> *in the earth upon the top of the mountains.* The opinion of those who take *a handful* <sup>143</sup> for a small portion appears to be well founded. They think that by the two circumstances here referred to, a rare and uncommon fertility is indicated. Only a very small quantity of wheat, not even more than a man can hold in the palm of his hand, has been sown, and that even upon the tops of the mountains, which generally are far from being fruitful; and yet so very abundant will be the increase, that the ears will wave and rustle in the winds as the trees on Lebanon. I do not, however, know whether so refined a comparison between seed-time and harvest is at all intended by David. His words may be considered more simply as denoting that so great will be the fertility, so abundant the produce of wheat which the mountain tops shall yield, that it may be reaped with full hand. By this figure is portrayed the large abundance of all good things which, through the blessing of God, would be enjoyed under the reign of Christ. To this is added the increase of children. Not only would the earth produce an abundance all kinds of fruits, but the cities and towns also would be fruitful in the production of men: *And they shall go out* <sup>144</sup> *from the city as the grass of the earth* I have preferred translating the word *Lebanon* in the genitive case instead of the nominative; for the metonymy of putting the name of the mountain, Lebanon, for the trees upon it, which is renounced by others, is somewhat harsh.

**17.** *His name shall endure for ever* The inspired writer again repeats what he had previously affirmed concerning the perpetual duration of this kingdom. And he doubtless intended carefully to distinguish it from earthly kingdoms, which either suddenly vanish away, or at length, oppressed with their own greatness, fall into ruin, affording by their destruction incontestible evidence that

<sup>141</sup> "Ou, le Leban." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, Lebanon."

<sup>142</sup> In the French version, the word *semee*, i.e., *sown*, is supplied.

<sup>143</sup> The noun *phissah*, here translated *handful*, is found only in this passage. In explaining 1 Kings 18:44, the Chaldee interpreter, for the Hebrew words rendered "as a man's hand," has *ke-phissath yad*, which strictly signify, "as if a part of the hand." On this authority several expositors, along with Calvin, have understood *phissah*, as signifying "a small quantity of corn," as much as may lie on a man's hand, or as he may hold within it. And some at the beginning of the verse supply the conditional particle *im*, *if* But Rosenmüller thinks that "others with more propriety consider the noun *phissah* as having the same signification as *diffusio*, *uberitas*, 'spreading abroad, plenty,' and as derived from the verb *phissah*, which, both in the Chaldee and in the Arabic, means *expandit*, *diffudit se*, 'he spread abroad, he enlarged himself.' The Syriac interpreter had, no doubt, this sense in view, when he rendered the words *multitudinem frumenti*, 'an abundance of corn.'"

<sup>144</sup> The word *tsits*, which Calvin renders *shall go out*, signifies *to spring from*, *to spring up* It is used, says Rosenmüller, with respect to plants or herbs when, sprouting from the seed, they make their appearance above ground in beauty and gracefulness, (Numbers 17:8.) It is used to denote also the reproduction of mankind in prosperous circumstances, (Isaiah 27:6.) From the noun *tsits*, [from the city,] we are at no loss to supply the proper nominative to the preceding verb; *q. d.*, *ex civitatibus* singulis *cives efflorescent*, 'from the cities severally, the citizens shall spring forth.' The expression is somewhat similar to that in Psalm 68:27, where the descendants of Israel are said to be *from the fountain of Israel*." The extraordinary fertility and great increase of population here predicted took place in Palestine under the reign of Solomon, as is evident from 1 Kings 4:20, where it is said, that in the time of Solomon "Judah and Israel were many as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry." But this prophecy is destined to receive its fullest accomplishment under the reign of the Messiah.

nothing in this world is stable and of long duration. When he says that *his name shall endure for ever*, it is not to be understood as merely implying that his fame should survive his death, as worldly men are ambitious that their name may not be buried with their body. He is rather speaking of the kingdom when he says that the name of this prince will continue illustrious and glorious for ever. Some explain the words *לִפְנֵי שֶׁמֶשׁ*, *liphney-shemesh*, which we have rendered, *in the presence of the sun*, as if he meant that the glory with which God would invest the kings of Judah would surpass the brightness of the sun; but this is at variance with the context, for he had said above, (verse 5th,) in the same sense, *with the sun*, and *in the presence of the moon*.

After having, therefore, made mention of the everlasting duration of the name of this king, he subjoins, by way of explanation, *his name shall be continued in the presence of the sun*. Literally it is, *his name shall have children*,<sup>145</sup> (for the Hebrew verb is derived from the noun for *son*,) that is to say, it shall be perpetuated from father to son;<sup>146</sup> and as the sun rises daily to enlighten the world, so shall the strength of this king be continually renewed, and thus will continue from age to age for ever. In like manner, we shall afterwards see that the sun and the moon are called witnesses of the same eternity, (Psalm 89:38.) Whence it follows that this cannot be understood of the earthly kingdom, which flourished only for a short time in the house of David, and not only lost its vigor in the third successor, but was at length ignominiously extinguished. It properly applies to the kingdom of Christ; and although that kingdom often totters upon the earth when assailed with the furious hatred of the whole world, and battered by the most formidable engines of Satan, it is yet wonderfully upheld and sustained by God, that it may not altogether fail. The words which follow, *All nations shall bless themselves in him*, admit of a twofold meaning. The Hebrews often use this form of expression when the name of any man is used as an example or formula of prayer for blessings. For instance, a man blesses himself in David, who beseeches God to be as favorable and bountiful to him as he proved himself to be towards David. On the other hand, he is said to curse in Sodom and Gomorrah who employs the names of these cities by which to pronounce some curse. If, then, these two expressions, *they shall bless themselves in him*, and *they shall call him blessed*, are used in the same sense; the expression, *to bless themselves in the king*, will just mean to pray that the same prosperity may be conferred upon us which was conferred upon this highly favored king, whose happy condition will excite universal admiration. But if it is considered preferable to

<sup>145</sup> “Filiabitur nomen ejus.” — Henry In the margin of our English Bibles it is, “He shall be as a son to continue his father’s name.” Bishop Patrick, therefore, paraphrases it, “His memory and fame shall never die, but be propagated from father to son, so long as the sun shall shine.” Rosenmüller reads, “*Sobolescet nomen ejus*, ‘his name shall increase,’ that is, shall be continued as long as the sun endureth; the government shall continue to his posterity in perpetual succession.” “The verb *לָנַח*, *nun*,” he adds, “which occurs only in this passage, is explained from the noun *בֵּן*, *nin*, Genesis 21:23; Job 18:19; Isaiah 14:22. In these passages the word has obviously the meaning of offspring, and by the Chaldee interpreters, it is constantly rendered by the word *בַּר*, *bar*, *falius*, ‘a son.’ It may, therefore, be assumed with certainty, that the verb *לָנַח*, *nun*, signifies *sobolem procreare*, ‘to procreate descendants.’ It may, however, be added, that the Alexandrine has here *διὰμνεῖ*, a rendering in which both the Vulgate and Jerome concur: ‘*perseverabit nomen ejus*,’ ‘his name shall endure.’ Dathe takes this last mentioned view. He supposes, that instead of *לָנַח*, *yinnon*, we should read *לָנַח*, *yikon*, *stabilietur*, — *permanebit*; “shall be established, — shall continue.” “The verb *לָנַח*, *nun*,” says he, “is not met with either in the Hebrew or in the cognate tongues, and is explained, — merely by conjecture, — *augescere* — *sobolescere*, — ‘to increase or multiply,’ because, as a noun in some of the dialects, it signifies a *fish* In the Septuagint the word is rendered *διὰμνεῖ*; in the Vulgate and by Jerome, *perseverabit*; in the Chaldee, *praeparatum est*; in the Syriac, *existet nomen ejus* All these, without doubt, read *לָנַח*, *yikon*, ‘prepared, — established, — fixed,’ — the word which we find in the parallel passage, Psalm 89:38. The letters *כ*, *caph*, and *נ*, *nun*, it is evident, may very easily be interchanged from their similarity in form.”

<sup>146</sup> “(Car c’est un verbe en la langue Hebraique qui vient du nom de Fils,) c’est a dire, sera perpetue de pere en fils.” — Fr.

distinguish between these two expressions, (which is not less probable,) to *bless one's self in the king*, will denote to seek happiness from him; for the nations will be convinced that nothing is more desirable than to receive from him laws and ordinances.

**18.** *Blessed be Jehovah God! the God of Israel.* <sup>147</sup> David, after having prayed for prosperity to his successors, breaks forth in praising God, because he was assured by the divine oracle that his prayers would not be in vain. Had he not with the eyes of faith beheld those things which we have seen above, his rejoicing would have been less free and lively. When he says that *God alone doeth wonderful things*, this, no doubt, is spoken in reference to the subject of which he is presently treating, with the view not only of commending the excellence of the kingdom, but also to admonish himself and others of the need which there is that God should display his wonderful and stupendous power for its preservation. And certainly it was not owing to any of David's successors, a few excepted, that the royal throne did not fall a hundred times, yea, was not even completely ruined. To go no farther, was not Solomon's most disgraceful apostasy deserving of utter destruction? And as to the rest of his successors, with the exception of Josias, Hezekiah, Jehoshaphat, and a few others, did they not fall from evil to worse, as if each strove to outstrip his predecessor, and thus so provoked the wrath of God, as it were deliberately, that it is wonderful that he did not immediately launch the thunderbolts of his vengeance upon the whole race utterly to destroy them? Moreover, as David, being endued with the Spirit of prophecy, was not ignorant that Satan would always continue to be a cruel enemy of the Church's welfare, he doubtless knew that the grace of God, of which he presently speaks, would have great and arduous difficulties to overcome in order to continue for ever in his own nation. And the event afterwards unquestionably showed by how many miracles God accomplished his promises, whether we consider the return of his people from the captivity of Babylon, or the astonishing deliverances which followed until Christ as a tender branch sprung out of a dead tree. David, therefore, with good reason prays that the glory of the divine name may fill the whole earth, since that kingdom was to be extended even to the uttermost boundaries of the globe, And that all the godly, with earnest and ardent affection of heart, may unite with him in the same prayers, there is added a confirmation in the words, *Amen, and Amen*

**20.** *The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.* We have before observed that this was not without cause added by Solomon, (if we may suppose him to have put the matter of this psalm into the form of poetical compositions) not only that he might avoid defrauding his father of the praise which was due to him, but also to stir up the Church the more earnestly to pour forth before God the same prayers which David had continued to offer even with his last breath. Let us then remember that it is our bounden duty to pray to God, both with unfeigned earnestness, and with unwearied perseverance, that he would be pleased to maintain and defend the Church under the government of his Son. The name of *Jesse*, the father of David, seems to be here introduced to bring to remembrance David's origin, that the grace of God may appear the more illustrious in having raised from the sheepfold a man of mean birth, as well as the youngest and the least esteemed among his brethren, and in having advanced him to so high a degree of honor, as to make him king over the chosen people.

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<sup>147</sup> This psalm concludes the second book of the Psalms, and this and the following verse are a doxology similar to that with which the first book and the other three are concluded. See volume 2, p. 126, note.

# PSALM 73

David, or whoever may have been the author of this psalm, contending as it were against the judgment of carnal sense and reason, begins by extolling the righteousness and goodness of God. He next confesses that when he saw the wicked abounding in wealth, and living in the indulgence of every kind of pleasure, yea, even scornfully mocking God, and cruelly harassing the righteous, and that when he saw, on the other hand, how in proportion to the care with which any studied to practice uprightness, was the degree in which they were weighed down by troubles and calamities, and that in general all the children of God were pining away, and oppressed with cares and sorrows, while God, as if sitting in heaven idle and unconcerned, did not interfere to remedy such a disordered state of matters; it gave him so severe a shock, as almost to dispose him to cast off all concern about religion and all fear of God. In the third place, he reproves his own folly in proceeding rashly and hastily to pronounce judgment, merely from a view of the present state of things, and shows the necessity of exercising patience, that our faith may not fail under these troubles and disquietudes. At last he concludes that, provided we leave the providence of God to take its own course, in the way which he has determined in his secret purpose,<sup>148</sup> in the end, matters will assume a very different aspect, and it will be seen, that, on the one hand, the righteous are not defrauded of their reward, and that, on the other, the wicked do not escape the hand of the judge.

*A Psalm of Asaph.*

## Psalm 73:1-3

**1.** Yet God is good to Israel, to those who are right of heart. **2.** As for me, my feet were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped. **3.** For I envied the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

As to the author of this psalm, I am not disposed to contend very strongly, although I think it probable that the name of Asaph was prefixed to it because the charge of singing it was committed to him, while the name of David, its author, was omitted, just as it is usual for us, when things are well known of themselves, not to be at the trouble of stating them. How much profit we may derive from meditation upon the doctrine contained in this psalm, it is easy to discover from the example of the prophet, who, although he had been exercised in no ordinary degree in true godliness, yet had great difficulty in keeping his footing, while reeling to and fro on the slippery ground on which he found himself placed. Nay, he acknowledges that, before he returned to such soundness of mind as enabled him to form a just judgment of the things which occasioned his trial, he had fallen into a state of almost brutish stupidity. As to ourselves, experience shows how slight impressions we have of the providence of God. We no doubt all agree in admitting that the world is governed by the hand of God; but were this truth deeply rooted in our hearts, our faith would be distinguished by far greater steadiness and perseverance in surmounting the temptations with which we are assailed in adversity. But when the smallest temptation which we meet with dislodges this doctrine

<sup>148</sup> “Pourveu que nous laissions la providence de Dieu tenir sa procedure par les degrez, qu’il a determinez en son conseil secret.” — *Fr.*

from our minds, it is manifest that we have not yet been truly and in good earnest convinced of its truth.

Besides, Satan has numberless artifices by which he dazzles our eyes and bewilders the mind; and then the confusion of things which prevails in the world produces so thick a mist, as to render it difficult for us to see through it, and to come to the conclusion that God governs and extends his care to things here below. The ungodly for the most part triumph; and although they deliberately stir up God to anger and provoke his vengeance, yet from his sparing them, it seems as if they had done nothing amiss in deriding him, and that they will never be called to account for it.<sup>149</sup> On the other hand, the righteous, pinched with poverty, oppressed with many troubles, harassed by multiplied wrongs, and covered with shame and reproach, groan and sigh: and in proportion to the earnestness with which they exert themselves in endeavoring to do good to all men, is the liberty which the wicked have the effrontery to take in abusing their patience. When such is the state of matters, where shall we find the person who is not sometimes tempted and importuned by the unholy suggestion, that the affairs of the world roll on at random, and as we say, are governed by chance?<sup>150</sup> This unhallowed imagination has doubtless obtained complete possession of the minds of the unbelieving, who are not illuminated by the Spirit of God, and thereby led to elevate their thoughts to the contemplation of eternal life. Accordingly, we see the reason why Solomon declares, that since “all things come alike to all, and there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked,” the hearts of the sons of men are full of impiety and contempt of God, (Ecclesiastes 9:2, 3;) — the reason is, because they do not consider that things apparently so disordered are under the direction and government of God.

Some of the heathen philosophers discoursed upon, and maintained the doctrine of a Divine Providence; but it was evident from experience that they had notwithstanding no real and thorough persuasion of its truth; for when things fell out contrary to their expectation, they openly disavowed what they had previously professed.<sup>151</sup> Of this we have a memorable example in Brutus. We can hardly conceive of a man surpassing him in courage, and all who intimately knew him bore testimony to his distinguished wisdom. Being of the sect of the Stoic philosophers, he spake many excellent things in commendation of the power and providence of God; and yet when at length vanquished by Antony, he cried out, that whatever he had believed concerning virtue had no foundation in truth, but was the mere invention of men, and that all the pains taken to live honestly and virtuously was only so much lost labor, since fortune rules over all the affairs of mankind. Thus this personage, who was distinguished for heroic courage, and an example of wonderful resolution, in renouncing virtue, and under the name of it cursing God, shamefully fell away. Hence it is manifest, how the sentiments of the ungodly fluctuate with the fluctuation of events. And how can it be expected that the heathen, who are not regenerated by the Spirit of God, should be able to resist such powerful and violent assaults, when even God’s own people have need of the special assistance of his grace to prevent the same temptation from prevailing in their hearts, and when they are sometimes shaken by it and ready to fall; even as David here confesses, that his steps had well nigh slipped? But let us now proceed to the consideration of the words of the psalm.

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<sup>149</sup> “Il semble qu’ils ont bon marche de se mocquer de luy, et qu’il n’en sera autre chose.” — *Fr.*

<sup>150</sup> “Que le monde tourne a l’aventure, et (comme on dit) est gouverne par fortune?” — *Fr.*

<sup>151</sup> “Ce poinct de doctrine, lequel ils avoyent fait mine de tenir bien resoluement.” — *Fr.* “This doctrine, which they had made a show of holding very resolutely.”



1. *Yet God is good to Israel.* The adverb ,<sup>152</sup> *ach*, does not here imply a simple affirmation *certainly*, as it often does in other places, but is taken adversatively for *yet*, *notwithstanding*, or some similar word. David opens the psalm abruptly; and from this we learn, what is worthy of particular notice, that before he broke forth into this language, his mind had been agitated with many doubts and conflicting suggestions. As a brave and valiant champion, he had been exercised in very painful struggles and temptations; but, after long and arduous exertion, he at length succeeded in shaking off all perverse imaginations, and came to the conclusion that *yet* God is gracious to his servants, and the faithful guardian of their welfare. Thus these words contain a tacit contrast between the unhallowed imaginations suggested to him by Satan, and the testimony in favor of true religion with which he now strengthens himself, denouncing, as it were, the judgment of the flesh, in giving place to misgiving thoughts with respect to the providence of God. We see then how emphatic is this exclamation of the Psalmist. He does not ascend into the chair to dispute after the manner of the philosophers, and to deliver his discourse in a style of studied oratory; but, as if he had escaped from hell, he proclaims, with a loud voice, and with impassioned feeling, that he had obtained the victory. To teach us by his own example the difficulty and arduousness of the conflict, he opens, so to speak, his heart and bowels, and would have us to understand something more than is expressed by the words which he employs. The amount of his language is, that although God, to the eye of sense and reason, may seem to neglect his servants, yet he always embraces them with his favor. He celebrates the providence of God, especially as it is extended towards genuine saints; to show them, not only that they are governed by God in common with other creatures, but that he watches over their welfare with special care, even as the master of a family carefully provides for and attends to his own household. God, it is true, governs the whole world; but he is graciously pleased to take a more close and peculiar inspection of his Church, which he has undertaken to maintain and defend.

This is the reason why the prophet speaks expressly of *Israel*; and why immediately after he limits this name to *those who are right of heart*; which is a kind of correction of the first sentence; for many proudly lay claim to the name of Israel, as if they constituted the chief members of the Church, while they are but Ishmaelites and Edomites. David, therefore, with the view of blotting out from the catalogue of the godly all the degenerate children of Abraham,<sup>153</sup> acknowledges none to belong to Israel but such as purely and uprightly worship God; as if he had said, “*When I declare that God is good to his Israel, I do not mean all those who, resting contented with a mere external profession, bear the name of Israelites, to which they have no just title; but I speak of the spiritual children of Abraham, who consecrate themselves to God with sincere affection of heart.*” Some explain the first clause, *God is good to Israel*, as referring to his chosen people; and the second clause, *to those who are right of heart*, as referring to strangers, to whom God would be gracious, provided they walked in true uprightness. But this is a frigid and forced interpretation. It is better to adhere to that which I have stated. David, in commending the goodness of God towards the chosen people and the Church, was under the necessity of cutting off from their number many hypocrites who had apostatised from the service of God, and were, therefore, unworthy of enjoying his fatherly favor. To his words corresponds the language of Christ to Nathanael, (John 1:47.)

<sup>152</sup> This particule here expresses the state of mind of a person meditating a difficult question in which he is much interested, and is hardly come to a conclusion; — a state, in the Psalmist’s case, between hope and despair, though strongly inclining to the former.” — *Horsley*.

<sup>153</sup> “Ceux qui estans descendus d’Abraham n’ensuyvoyent point sa saintete.” — *Fr.* “Those who being descended from Abraham did not follow his holiness.”

“Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” As the fear of God among the Jews was at that time well nigh extinguished, and there remained among them almost nothing else but the “circumcision made with hands,” that is to say, outward circumcision, Christ, to discriminate between the true children of Abraham and hypocrites, lays it down as a distinguishing characteristic of the former, that they are free from guile. And assuredly in the service of God, no qualification is more indispensable than uprightness of heart.

2. *As for me, etc.* Literally, it is, *And I*: which ought to be read with emphasis; for David means that those temptations, which cast an affront upon the honor of God, and overwhelm faith, not only assail the common class of men, or those who are endued only with some small measure of the fear of God, but that he himself, who ought to have profited above all others in the school of God, had experienced his own share of them. By thus setting himself forth as an example, he designed the more effectually to arouse and incite us to take great heed to ourselves. He did not, it is true, actually succumb under the temptation; but, in declaring *that his feet were almost gone*, and that *his steps had well nigh slipped*, he warns us that all are in danger of falling, unless they are upheld by the powerful hand of God.

3. *For I envied the foolish* <sup>154</sup> Here he declares the nature of the temptation with which he was assailed. It consisted in this, that when he saw the present prosperous state of the wicked, and from it judged them to be happy, he had envied their condition. We are certainly under a grievous and a dangerous temptation, when we not only, in our own minds, quarrel with God for not setting matters in due order, but also when we give ourselves loose reins, boldly to commit iniquity, because it seems to us that we may commit it, and yet escape with impunity. The sneering jest of Dionysius the younger, a tyrant of Sicily, when, after having robbed the temple of Syracuse, he had a prosperous voyage with the plunder, is well known. <sup>155</sup> “See you not,” says he to those who were with him, “how the gods favor the sacrilegious?” In the same way, the prosperity of the wicked is taken as an encouragement to commit sin; for we are ready to imagine, that, since God grants them so much of the good things of this life, they are the objects of his approbation and favor. We see how their prosperous condition wounded David to the heart, leading him almost to think that there was nothing better for him than to join himself to their company, and to follow their course of life. <sup>156</sup> By applying to the ungodly the appellation of *foolish*, he does not simply mean that the sins which they commit are committed through ignorance or inadvertence, but he sets their folly in opposition to the fear of God, which is the principal constituent of true wisdom. <sup>157</sup> The ungodly are, no doubt, crafty; but, being destitute of the fundamental principle of all right judgment, which consists in this, that we must regulate and frame our lives according to the will of God, they are foolish; and this is the effect of their own blindness.

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<sup>154</sup> The original word for *the foolish* signifies “men of no principle, wild, giddy, vain boasters.” Boothroyd renders it “the madly profane,” and Fry, “the vain-glorious.”

<sup>155</sup> “On scait assez par les histoires le brocard duquel usa anciennement un tyran de Sicile nomme Denis le jeune, quand apres avoir pille le temple de Syracuses, il se mit sur la mer, et veit qu’il avoit fort bon vent pour naviger.” — *Fr.*

<sup>156</sup> “Et suyvre a leur train.” — *Fr.*

<sup>157</sup> “Laquelle est le fondement et le comble de sagesse.” — *Fr.* “Which is the foundation and the cope-stone of wisdom.

## Psalm 73:4-9

**4.** For there are no bands to their death, and their strength is vigorous. <sup>158</sup> **5.** They are not in the trouble that is common to man; neither are they scourged [or stricken] with other men. **6.** Therefore pride compasseth them as a chain; the raiment of violence hath covered them. **7.** Their eye goeth out for fatness; they have passed beyond [or exceeded] the thoughts of their heart. **8.** They become insolent, and wickedly talk of extortion: <sup>159</sup> they speak from on high. **9.** They have set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. <sup>160</sup>

**4** *For there are no bands to their death.* The Psalmist describes the comforts and advantages of the ungodly, which are as it were so many temptations to shake the faith of the people of God. He begins with the good health which they enjoy, telling us, that they are robust and vigorous, and have not to draw their breath with difficulty through continual sicknesses, as will often be the case with regard to true believers. <sup>161</sup> Some explain *bands to death*, as meaning *delays*, viewing the words as implying that the wicked die suddenly, and in a moment, not having to struggle with the pangs of dissolution. In the book of Job it is reckoned among the earthly felicities of the ungodly, That, after having enjoyed to the full their luxurious pleasures, they “in a moment go down to the grave,” (Job 21:13.) And it is related of Julius Caesar, that, the day before he was put to death, he remarked, that to die suddenly and unexpectedly, seemed to him to be a happy death. Thus, then, according to the opinion of these expositors, David complains that the wicked go to death by a smooth and easy path, without much trouble and anxiety. But I am rather inclined to agree with those who read these two clauses jointly in this way: *Their strength is vigorous, and, in respect to them, there are no bands to death;* because they are not dragged to death like prisoners. <sup>162</sup> As diseases lay prostrate

<sup>158</sup> Literally, “Their strength is fat.” Jerome renders as if, for     , his MSS. had     , ‘et firma sunt vestibula eorum;’ ‘their stately mansions are firm.’ The stability of a dwelling is a significant image of general prosperity. — *Horsley*

<sup>159</sup> “Oppression. Dr Boothroyd joins this word to the latter clause, thus: Concerning oppression they talk loftily. This we think preferable.” — *Williams*.

<sup>160</sup> “The powerful effects of the tongue are expressed by a like figure in a Greek proverb preserved by Suidas. Τλωσσα ποι πορευύν; πόλιν ἀνορθώσουσα καὶ πόλιν καταστρέψουσα. ‘Tongue, whither goest thou? To build up a city, and to destroy a city.’ Garrulity is called ‘the walk of the tongue’ in a line quoted by Stobaeus (*Serm* 36) from Astydamas —  
 Tlw&gt;sshv peri&gt;pato&gt;v ejstin ajdolesci&gt;a.”“

*Merrick’Annotations.*

<sup>161</sup> “Comme souvent il en prendra aux fideles.” — *Fr.*

<sup>162</sup> “They are not dragged to death,” says Poole, “either by the hand or sentence of the magistrate, which yet they deserve, nor by any lingering or grievous torments of mind or body, which is the case with many good men; but they enjoy a sweet and quiet death, dropping into the grave like ripe fruit from the tree, without any violence used to them, (compare Job 5:26 and 31:13.) The word translated *bands* occurs in only one other place of Scripture, Isaiah 58:6, where in all the ancient versions it is rendered *bands* But *bands* will bear various significations. In the Hebrew style it often signifies *the pangs of child-birth*; and therefore the meaning here may be, *they have no pangs in their death; i e., they die an easy death, being suffered to live on to extreme old age, when the flame of life gradually and quietly becomes extinct.* It was also used by the Hebrews to express *diseases* of any kind, and this is the sense, in which Calvin understands it. Thus Jesus says of the “woman who had a spirit of infirmity,” a sore disease inflicted upon her by an evil spirit, “eighteen years,” “Thou art loosed from thine infirmity,” (and loosing, we know, applies to bands:) he again describes her as “this daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years;” and farther says, “Ought she not to be loosed from this bond?” that is, cured of this sickness? Luke 13:11, 12, 16. According to this view, the meaning will be, *they have no violent diseases in their death* Horsley reads, “There is no fatality in their death.” After observing that the word     , translated *bands*, occurs but in one other place in the whole Bible, Isaiah 58:6; where the LXX. have rendered it συνδεσμῶν, and the Vulgate *colligationes*, he says, “From its sense there, and from its seeming affinity with the roots     and     , I should guess that in a secondary and figurative sense, the word may denote the strongest of all bands or

our strength, they are so many messengers of death, warning us of the frailty and short duration of our life. They are therefore with propriety compared to bands, with which God binds us to his yoke, lest our strength and rigour should incite us to licentiousness and rebellion.

5. *They are not in the trouble that is common to man.* Here it is declared that the wicked enjoy a delightful repose, and are as it were by special privilege exempted from the miseries to which mankind in general are subject. They also are no doubt involved in afflictions as well as the good, and God often executes his judgments upon them; but, for the express purpose of trying our faith, he always places some of them as it were upon an elevated stage, who appear to be privileged to live in a state of exemption from calamities, as is here described. Now, when we consider that the life of men is full of labor and miseries, and that this is the law and condition of living appointed for all, it is a sore temptation to behold the despisers of God indulging themselves in their luxurious pleasures and enjoying great ease, as if they were elevated above the rest of the world into a region of pleasure, where they had a nest for themselves apart. <sup>163</sup>

6. *Therefore pride compasseth them as a chain.* This complaint proceeds farther than the preceding; for we are here told that although God sees the ungodly shamefully and wickedly abusing his kindness and clemency, he notwithstanding bears with their ingratitude and rebellion. The Psalmist employs a similitude taken from the dress and attire of the body, to show that such persons glory in their evil deeds. The verb , *anak*, which we have rendered, *encompasseth them as a chain*, comes from a noun which signifies *a chain*. The language, therefore, implies that the ungodly glory in their audacity and madness, as if they were richly adorned with a chain of gold: <sup>164</sup> and that violence serves them for raiment, thinking, as they do, that it renders them very stately and honorable. Some translate the Hebrew word , *shith*, which we have rendered *raiment*, by *buttocks*; but this is a sense which the scope of the passage will by no means admit. David, I have no doubt, after having commenced at the neck or head — for the Hebrew verb , *anak* which he uses, signifies also sometimes *to crown* <sup>165</sup> — now meant to comprehend, in one word, the whole attire of the person. The amount of what is stated is, that the wicked are so blinded with their prosperity, as to become more and more proud and insolent <sup>166</sup> The Psalmist has very properly put *pride* first in order, and then added *violence* to it as its companion; for what is the reason why the ungodly seize and plunder whatever they can get on all sides, and exercise so much cruelty, but because they

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knots, physical necessity, or fate; and in that sense it may be taken here. The complaint is, that the ordinary constitution of the world is supposed to contain no certain provision for the extermination of the impious; that there is no necessary and immediate connection between moral evil and physical, wickedness and death." The Septuagint reads, ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἀνάλευσις ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτῶν: "For there is no sign of reluctance in their death." The Vulgate, "Quia non est respectus morti eorum;" "For they do not think of dying," or, "For they take no notice of their death." The Chaldee, "They are not terrified or troubled on account of the day of their death."

<sup>163</sup> "En un lieu de plaisance, et comme pour avoir leur nid a part." — *Fr.*

<sup>164</sup> There is here a metaphorical allusion to the rich collars or chains worn about the necks of great personages for ornament. Compare Proverbs 1:9, and Cant. 4, 9. *Pride compassed* these prosperous wicked men *about as a chain*; they wore it for an ornament as gold chains or collars were worn about the neck; discovering it by their stately carriage. See Isaiah 3:16. Or there may be an allusion to the office which some of them bore; for chains of gold were among the ensigns of magistracy and civil power.

<sup>165</sup> Accordingly, the Chaldee, instead of "compasseth them as a chain." has "crowneth them as a crown or diadem does the head."

<sup>166</sup> "*Violence covereth them as a garment.* Wicked men that are prosperous and proud, are generally oppressive to others; and are very often open in their acts of violence, which are as openly done, and to be seen of all men, as the clothes they wear upon their backs; and frequently the clothes they wear are got by rapine and oppression, so that they may properly be called garments of violence. See Isaiah 59:6." — *Dr Gill.*

account all other men as nothing in comparison of themselves; or rather persuade themselves that mankind are born only for them? The source, then, and, as it were, the mother of all violence, is pride.

7. *Their eye goeth out for fatness.* <sup>167</sup> He now adds, that it is not wonderful to see the ungodly breaking forth with such violence and cruelty, since, by reason of fatness and pampering, their eyes are ready to start out of their heads. Some explain the words *goeth out* as meaning, that their eyes being covered and hidden with fat, were, so to speak, lost, and could not be perceived in their sockets. But as fat causes the eyes to project from the head, I prefer retaining the proper meaning of the words. Let it, however, be observed, that David is not to be understood as speaking of the bodily countenance, but as expressing metaphorically the pride with which the ungodly are inflated on account of the abundance which they possess. They so glut and intoxicate themselves with their prosperity, that afterwards they are ready to burst with pride. The last clause of the verse is also explained in two ways. Some think that by the verb *abar*, which we have translated *passed beyond*, is denoted *unbridled presumption*; <sup>168</sup> for the ungodly are not contented to keep themselves within ordinary bounds, but in their wild and extravagant projects mount above the clouds. We know, in fact, that they often deliberate with themselves how they may take possession of the whole world; yea, they would wish God to create new worlds for them. In short, being altogether insatiable, they pass beyond heaven and earth in their wild and unbounded desires. It would certainly not be inappropriate to explain the verb as meaning, that their foolish thoughts can be regulated by no law, nor kept within any bounds. But there is another exposition which is also very suitable, namely, that the prosperity and success which they meet with exceed all the flattering prospects which they had pictured in their imaginations. We certainly see some of them who obtain more than ever they had desired, as if, whilst they were asleep, Fortune laid nets and fished for them, <sup>169</sup> — the device under which king Demetrius was in old time wittily painted, who had taken so many cities, although otherwise he was neither skillful nor vigilant, nor of great foresight. If we are inclined to take this view of the words, this clause will be added by way of exposition, to teach us what is meant by that *fatness*, spoken of before — that it means that God heaps upon the wicked, and fills them with, an abundance of all good things, beyond what they had ever either desired or thought of.

8. *They become insolent, and wickedly talk of extortion.* Some take the verb *yamicu*, in an active transitive sense, and explain it as meaning, that the wicked soften, that is to say, render others pusillanimous, or frighten and intimidate them. <sup>170</sup> But as the idiom of the language admits also of its being understood in the neuter sense, I have adopted the interpretation which agreed best with the scope of the passage, namely, that the wicked, forgetting themselves to be men, and by their unbounded audacity trampling under foot all shame and honesty, dissemble not their wickedness, but, on the contrary, loudly boast of their extortion. And, indeed, we see that wicked men, after having for some time got every thing to prosper according to their desires, cast off all sham and

<sup>167</sup> “Their eyes are starting out for fatness.” — *Horsley*. “*Their eyes swell with fatness* — this is a proverbial expression, used to designate the opulent, who are very commonly given to sensuality: comp. Job 15:27; Psalm 17:10.” — *Cresswell*.

<sup>168</sup> “*The fantasies of their minds run into excess; i.e., they suffer their imaginations to sway them.*” — *Cresswell*.

<sup>169</sup> “Et pesche pour eux.” *Fr*.

<sup>170</sup> “Exposans que les meschans amolissent, c’est a dire, rendent lasches les autres, c’est a dire, les espouantent et intimident.” — *Fr* *yamicu*, is rendered by *Vatablus*, *Cocceius*, *Gejer*, and *Michaelis*, “They cause to consume or melt away.” “They melt or dissolve others,” says *Dr Gill*, “they consume them, and waste their estates by their oppression and violence; they make their hearts to melt with their threatening and terrifying words; or they make them dissolute in their lives by keeping them company.” *Mudge* reads, “They behave corruptly;” and *Horsley*, “They are in the last stage of degeneracy.”

are at no pains to conceal themselves when about to commit iniquity, but loudly proclaim their own turpitude. “What!” they will say, “is it not in my power to deprive you of all that you possess, and even to cut your throat?” Robbers, it is true, can do the same thing; but then they hide themselves for fear. These giants, or rather inhuman monsters, of whom David speaks, on the contrary not only imagine that they are exempted from subjection to any law, but, unmindful of their own weakness, foam furiously, as if there were no distinction between good and evil, between right and wrong. If, however, the other interpretation should be preferred, That the wicked intimidate the simple and peaceable by boasting of the great oppressions and outrages which they can perpetrate upon them, I do not object to it. When the poor and the afflicted find themselves at the mercy of these wicked men, they cannot but tremble, and, so to speak, melt and dissolve upon seeing them in possession of so much power. With respect to the expression, *They speak from on high*,<sup>171</sup> implies, that they pour forth their insolent and abusive speech upon the heads of all others. As proud men, who disdain to look directly at any body, are said, in the Latin tongue, *despicere*, and in the Greek, *Katablepein*, that is, *to look down*;<sup>172</sup> so David introduces them as speaking from on high, because it seems to them that they have nothing in common with other men, but think themselves a distinct class of beings, and, as it were, little gods.<sup>173</sup>

**9.** *They have set their mouth against the heavens.* Here it is declared that they utter their contumelious speeches as well against God as against men; for they imagine that nothing is too arduous for them to attempt, and flatter themselves that heaven and earth are subject to them. If any should endeavor to alarm them by setting before them the power of God, they audaciously break through this barrier; and, with respect to men, they have no idea of any difficulty arising from such a quarter. Thus, there is no obstacle to repress their proud and vaunting speeches, but *their tongue walketh through the whole earth*. This form of expression seems to be hyperbolic; but when we consider how great and unbounded their presumption is, we will admit that the Psalmist teaches nothing but what experience shows to be matter of fact.

### Psalm 73:10-14

**10.** On this account his people will return hither, and waters of a full cup will be wrung out to them. **11.** And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High? **12.** Behold! These are the ungodly, and yet they enjoy repose [or quietness] for ever: they heap up

<sup>171</sup> The original word, *memmarom*, for *from on high*, is translated by our English version *loftily* But Musculus, Junius, Tremellius, Piscator, Mudge, Horsley, and others read with Calvin, *from on high* *They speak from on high*, “as if they were in heaven and above all creatures, and even God himself; and as if what they said were oracles, and to be received as such without any scruple and hesitation. Thus Pharaoh, Sennacherib, and Nebuchadnezzar spake, Exodus 5:2; Isaiah 36:20; Daniel 3:15.” — *Dr Gill*

<sup>172</sup> “Car comme les Latins et aussi les Grecs, quand ils deservent la contenance des gens enyvrez d’orgueil, ont des verbes qui signifient Regarder en bas, d’autant que telles gens ne daignent pas regarder droit les personnes.” — *Fr.* “As the Romans, and also the Greeks, when they describe the countenance of persons intoxicated with pride, have words which mean *to look down*, because such persons deign not to look directly at other people.”

<sup>173</sup> “Pource qu’il ne leur semble point avis qu’ils ayent rien de commun avec les autres hommes, mais pensent estre quelque chose a part, et comme des petis dieux.” — *Fr.*

riches. **13.** Surely I have purified my heart in vain, and washed my hands daily.<sup>174</sup> **14.** And I have been scourged daily, and my chastisement has been every morning.

**10.** *On this account his people will return hither.* Commentators wrest this sentence into a variety of meanings. In the first place, as the relative *his* is used, without an antecedent indicating whose people are spoken of, some understand it simply of the ungodly, as if it had been said, That the ungodly always fall back upon this reflection: and they view the word *people* as denoting *a great troop or band*; for as soon as a wicked man raises his standard, he always succeeds in drawing a multitude of associates after him. They, therefore, think the meaning to be, that every prosperous ungodly man has people flocking about him, as it were, in troops; and that, when within his palace or magnificent mansion, they are content with getting water to drink; so much does this perverse imagination bewitch them. But there is another sense much more correct, and which is also approved by the majority of commentators; namely, that the people of God<sup>175</sup> return hither. Some take the word , *halom*, which we have rendered *hither*, as denoting *afflicted*;<sup>176</sup> but this is a forced interpretation.

The meaning is not, however, as yet, sufficiently evident, and therefore we must inquire into it more closely.<sup>177</sup> Some read the whole verse connectedly, thus: The people of God return hither, that they may drain full cups of the water of sorrow. But, in my opinion, this verse depends upon the preceding statements, and the sense is, That many who had been regarded as belonging to the people of God were carried away by this temptation, and were even shipwrecked and swallowed up by it. The prophet does not seem to speak here of the chosen people of God, but only to point to hypocrites and counterfeit Israelites who occupy a place in the Church. He declares that such persons are overwhelmed in destruction, because, being foolishly led away to envy the wicked, and to desire to follow them,<sup>178</sup> they bid adieu to God and to all religion. Still, however, this might, without any impropriety, be referred to the chosen seed, many of whom are so violently harassed by this temptation, that they turn aside into crooked by-paths: not that they devote themselves to wickedness, but because they do not firmly persevere in the right path. The sense then will be, that not only the herd of the profane, but even true believers, who have determined to serve *God*, are

<sup>174</sup> “Et lave mes mains en nettete.” — *Fr.* “And washed my hands in innocency.” The Psalmist may allude to the rite of ablution which was in use among the Jews. See Deuteronomy 21:6, and Psalm 26:6. Or he may be understood as signifying by the metaphor of washing the hands in general, the pains which he took to be blameless in the whole of his outward conduct. “Opposite to the phrase, *to wash in innocence*,” says Merrick, “is the *scelere imbuere* of Cicero, (*Philipp.* v.) ‘Cum autem semel gladium scelere imbuisset,’” etc. See Job 9:30.

<sup>175</sup> The Septuagint, Vulgate, Syriac, Arabic, and Æthiopic versions read, “my people.”

<sup>176</sup> “Abu Walid,” says Hammond, “hath a peculiar way of rendering , as if it were , the infinitive, *with breaking of spirit*.” A similar interpretation is adopted by Horsley. “For ,” says he, “many MSS. read , which I take as the participle *Pual* of the verb , ‘Contusus miseria,’ scilicet.” He reads,

“Therefore his [God’s] people sit woebegone.”

To make out this translation, he adopts another of the various readings of MSS. “For ,” says he, “many MSS. have : I would transpose the *vau*, and read . The third person future, *Hophal*, signifies *is made to sit, is settled*, attended with grief and consternation at the unpunished audacity of the profane.”

<sup>177</sup> “Et pourtant il nous y faut aviser de plus pres.” — *Fr.*

<sup>178</sup> “Stulta aemulatione decepti.” — *Lat.* “Se abusans par leur folie a porter envie aux meschans, et les vouloir ensuyvre.” —

*Fr.*

tempted with this unlawful and perverse envy and emulation.<sup>179</sup> What follows, *Waters of a full cup are wrung out to them*,<sup>180</sup> seems to be the reason of the statement in the preceding clause, implying that they are tormented with vexation and sorrow, when no advantage appears to be derived from cultivating true religion. *To be saturated with waters* is put metaphorically for to drink the bitterest distresses, and to be filled with immeasurable sorrows.

**11.** *And they say, How doth God know?* Some commentators maintain that the Prophet here returns to the ungodly, and relates the scoffings and blasphemies with which they stimulate and stir up themselves to commit sin; but of this I cannot approve. David rather explains what he had stated in the preceding verse, as to the fact that the faithful fall into evil thoughts and wicked imaginations when the short-lived prosperity of the ungodly dazzles their eyes. He tells us that they begin then to call in question, Whether there is knowledge in God. Among worldly men, this madness is too common. Ovid thus speaks in one of his verses:

“Sollicitor nullos esse putare deos;”

“I am tempted to think that there are no gods.”

It was, indeed, a heathen poet who spake in this manner; but as we know that the poets express the common thoughts of men, and the language which generally predominates in their minds,<sup>181</sup> it is certain that he spake, as it were, in the person of the great mass of mankind, when he frankly confessed, that as soon as any adversity happens, men forget all knowledge of God. They not only doubt whether there is a God, but they even enter into debate with, and chide him. What else is the meaning of that complaint which we meet with in the ancient Latin Poet-

“*Nec Saturnius haec oculis pater adspicit aequis:*”

“Nor does the great god, the son of Saturn, regard these things with impartial eyes,” — but that the woman, of whom he there speaks, accuses her god Jupiter of unrighteousness, because she was not dealt with in the way which she desired? It is then too common, among the unbelieving part of mankind, to deny that God cares for and governs the world, and to maintain that all is the result of chance.<sup>182</sup> But David here informs us that even true believers stumble in this respect: not that they break forth into this blasphemy, but because they are unable, all at once, to keep their minds under restraint when God seems to cease from executing his office. The expostulation of Jeremiah is well known,

<sup>179</sup> While Calvin admits that the words, *his people*, may refer to true believers, he conceives that carnal and hypocritical Israelites are rather intended. One great objection to the opinion, that true believers are at all intended is, that stumbled though they often are at the unequal distributions of the present state, and chargeable though they may be with entertaining murmuring thoughts in reference to this matter, we can scarcely suppose that they would so far depart from every principle of truth and propriety, as to break forth into such language as is ascribed in verse 11th to the persons here spoken of, “How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?” Neither David nor Jeremiah, though much perplexed in reconciling the prosperity of the wicked and the afflicted state of God’s people, with the righteousness and goodness of Divine Providence, ever gave utterance to any such language. See Psalm 38 and Jeremiah 12. Walford thinks that “it is far more agreeable to the design of the entire passage, to interpret the words, *his people*, of the friends and connections of the wicked, who imitate their actions.” In support of this it may be observed, that the description of the condition, conduct, and words, of these prosperous ungodly men, commences at the 4th verse, and seems to be continued to the 13th verse, where the Psalmist’s reflections upon the subject begin, and are continued to the close of the psalm.

<sup>180</sup> This has also been understood as denoting the prosperity, the abundance of all outward good things bestowed upon the persons referred to.

<sup>181</sup> “Et les discours qui regnent communeement en leur cerveaux.” — *Fr.*

<sup>182</sup> “Que tout vient a l’aventure.” — *Fr.*



“Righteous art thou, O Lord! when I plead with thee; yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?” (Jeremiah 12:1)

It appears from that passage that even the godly are tempted to doubt of the Providence of God, but at the same time that doubts on this subject do not go very deep into their hearts; for Jeremiah at the outset protests the contrary; and by doing so, puts, as it were, a bridle upon himself. Yet they do not always so speedily anticipate the snares of Satan, as to avoid asking, under the influence of a doubting spirit, how it can happen, if God really regards the world, that he does not remedy the great confusion which prevails in it? Of those who impiously prate against God by denying his Providence, there are two sorts. Some openly pour out their blasphemies, asserting that God, delighting in ease and pleasure, cares about nothing, but leaves the government of all things to chance. Others, although they keep their thoughts on this subject to themselves, and are silent before men, yet cease not secretly to fret against God, and to accuse him of injustice or of indolence, in conniving at wickedness, neglecting the godly, and allowing all things to be involved in confusion, and to go to wreck. But the people of God, before these perverse and detestable thoughts enter deep into their hearts, disburden themselves into the bosom of God,<sup>183</sup> and their only desire is to acquiesce in his secret judgments, the reason of which is hidden from them. The meaning of this passage, therefore, is, that not only the wicked, when they see things in the world so full of disorder, conceive only of a blind government, which they attribute to fortune or chance; but that even true believers themselves are shaken, so as to doubt of the Providence of God; and that unless they were wonderfully preserved by his hand, they would be completely swallowed up in this abyss.

**12. Behold! these are the ungodly.** The Psalmist here shows, as it were by a vivid pictorial representation, the character of that envy which had well nigh overthrown him. *Behold!* says he, *these are wicked men!* and yet they happily enjoy their ease and pleasures undisturbed, and are exalted to power and influence; and that not merely for a few days, but their prosperity is of long duration, and has, as it were, an endless course. And is there anything which seems to our judgment less reasonable than that persons whose wickedness is accounted infamous and detestable, even in the eyes of men, should be treated with such liberality and indulgence by God? Some here take the Hebrew word *olam*, for *the world*, but improperly. It rather denotes in this passage *an age*;<sup>184</sup> and what David complains of is, that the prosperity of the wicked is stable and of long duration, and that to see it last so long wears out the patience of the righteous. Upon seeing the wicked so tenderly cherished by God, he descends to the consideration of his own case; and as his conscience bore him testimony that he had walked sincerely and uprightly, he reasons with himself as to what advantage he had derived from studiously devoting himself to the practice of righteousness, since he was afflicted and harassed in a very unusual degree. He tells us that he was *scourged daily*, and that as often as the sun rose, some affliction or other was prepared for him, so that there was no end to his calamities. In short the amount of his reasoning is this, “Truly I have labored in vain to obtain and preserve a pure heart and clean hands, seeing continued afflictions await me, and, so to speak, are on the watch to meet me at break of day. Such a condition surely shows that there is no reward for innocence before God, else he would certainly deal somewhat more compassionately towards those who serve him.” As the true holiness for which the godly are distinguished consists

<sup>183</sup> “En la presence de Dieu.” — *Fr.* “In the presence of God.”

<sup>184</sup> “Plustost il signifie yci un siecle,” — *Fr.*

of two parts, first, of purity of heart, and, secondly, of righteousness in the outward conduct, David attributes both to himself. Let us learn, from his example, to join them together: let us, in the first place, begin with purity of heart, and then let us give evidence of this before men by uprightness and integrity in our conduct.

### Psalm 73:15-17

**15.** If I should say, I will speak thus, Behold! the generation of thy children: I have transgressed.  
<sup>185</sup> **16.** Although I applied my mind to know this, it was a trouble [or, a painful thing] in my sight;  
**17.** Until I entered into the sanctuaries of God, and understood <sup>186</sup> their latter end.

**15.** *If I should say, I will speak thus.* David, perceiving the sinfulness of the thoughts with which he was tempted, puts a bridle upon himself, and reproves his inconstancy in allowing his mind to entertain doubts on such a subject. We can be at no loss in discovering his meaning; but there is some difficulty or obscurity in the words. The last Hebrew verb in the verse, *bagad*, signifies *to transgress*, and also *to deceive*. Some, therefore, translate, *I have deceived the generation of thy children*, as if David had said, Were I to speak thus, I should defraud thy children of their hope. Others read, *I have transgressed against the generation of thy children*; that is, Were I to speak thus, I would be guilty of inflicting an injury upon them. But as the words of the prophet stand in this order, *Behold! the generation of thy children: I have transgressed*; and as a very good meaning may be elicited from them, I would expound them simply in this way: Were I to approve of such wicked thoughts and doubts, I would transgress; for, behold! the righteous are still remaining on the earth, and thou reservest in every age some people for thyself. Thus it will be unnecessary to make any supplement to complete the sense, and the verb *bagadti*, *I have transgressed*, will read by itself, and not construed with any other part of the verse. We have elsewhere had occasion to observe, that the Hebrew noun *dor*, which we have rendered *generation*, is properly to be referred to time. The idea which David intends to convey is now perfectly obvious. Whilst worldly men give loose reins to their unhallowed speculations, until at length they become hardened, and, divesting themselves of all fear of God, cast away along with it the hope of salvation, he restrains himself that he may not rush into the like destruction. *To speak* or *to declare* <sup>187</sup> here signifies *to utter what had been meditated upon*. His meaning, therefore, is, that had he pronounced judgment on this subject as of a thing certain, he would have been chargeable with a very heinous transgression. He found himself before involved in doubt, but now he acknowledges that he had grievously offended; and the reason of this he places between the words in which he expresses these two states

<sup>185</sup> “Ou, J’ay transgressé contre la generation de tes enfans.” — *Fr. marg.* “Or, I have transgressed against the generation of thy children”

<sup>186</sup> “Aye considere.” — *Fr.* “Considered.”

<sup>187</sup> The word in the Hebrew text is *saphar* Horsley translates it “to argue” —

“If I resolve to argue thus,

I should be a traitor to the generation of thy children.”

“The verb *saphar*,” says he, “which literally signifies to count or reckon, may easily signify ‘to reason within one’s self, to syllogise,’ as is indeed the case with the corresponding words of many languages; as λογίζεσθαι, *ratiocinari*, *putare*, *reckon*, *count*.”

of mind: which is, because God always sees to it, that there are some of his own people remaining in the world. He seems to repeat the demonstrative particle, *Behold!* for the sake of contrast. He had a little before said, *Behold! these are the ungodly;* and here he says, *Behold! the generation of thy children.* It is assuredly nothing less than a divine miracle that the Church, which is so furiously assaulted by Satan and innumerable hosts of enemies, continues safe.

**16.** *Although I applied my mind to know this.* The first verb, *chashab*, which he employs, properly signifies *to reckon* or *count*, and sometimes *to consider* or *weigh*. But the words which follow in the sentence require the sense which I have given, That he applied his mind to know the part of Divine Providence referred to. He has already condemned himself for having transgressed; but still he acknowledges, that until he entered into the sanctuaries of God, he was not altogether disentangled from the doubts with which his mind had been perplexed. In short, he intimates that he had reflected on this subject on all sides, and yet, by all his reasoning upon it, could not comprehend how God, amidst so great disorders and confusions, continued to govern the world. Moreover, in speaking thus of himself, he teaches us, that when men are merely under the guidance of their own understandings, the inevitable consequence is, that they sink under their trouble, not being able by their own deliberations and reasonings to arrive at any certain or fixed conclusions; for there is no doubt that he puts *the sanctuaries of God* in opposition to carnal reason. Hence it follows, that all the knowledge and wisdom which men have of their own is vain and unsubstantial; since all true wisdom among men — all that deserves to be so called — consists in this one point,<sup>188</sup> That they are docile, and implicitly submit to the teaching of the Word of God. The Psalmist does not speak of unbelievers who are wilfully blind, who involve themselves in errors, and are also very glad to find some color or pretext for taking offense, that they may withdraw to a distance from God. It is of himself that he speaks; and although he applied his mind to the investigation of divine subjects, not only earnestly, but with all humility; and although, at the same time, he contemplated, according to his small measure, the high judgments of God, not only with attention, but also with reverence, yet he confesses that he failed of success; for the word *trouble*<sup>189</sup> here implies unprofitable or lost labor. Whoever, therefore, in applying himself to the examination of God's judgments, expects to become acquainted with them by his natural understanding, will be disappointed, and will find that he is engaged in a task at once painful and profitless; and, therefore, it is indispensably necessary to rise higher, and to seek illumination from heaven.

By *the sanctuaries of God* some, even among the Hebrews, understand the celestial mansions in which the spirits of the just and angels dwell; as if David had said, This was a painful thing in my sight, until I came to acknowledge in good earnest that men are not created to flourish for a short time in this world, and to luxuriate in pleasures while in it, but that their condition here is that of pilgrims, whose aspirations, during their earthly pilgrimage, should be towards heaven. I readily admit that no man can form a right judgment of the providence of God; but he who elevates his mind above the earth; but it is more simple and natural to understand the word *sanctuary* as denoting celestial doctrine. As the book of the law was laid up in the sanctuary, from which the oracles of heaven were to be obtained, that is to say, the declaration of the will of God,<sup>190</sup> and as this was the true way of acquiring profitable instruction, David very properly puts *entering into the sanctuaries*,

<sup>188</sup> “D'autant que toute la vraye sagesse qui doit estre ainsi nommee es hommes, consiste en un seul point.” — *Fr.*

<sup>189</sup> Green translates the Hebrew word for this, “hard;” Horsley, “perplexing;” and Boothroyd, “difficult.”

<sup>190</sup> “C'est a dire, la declaration de la volonte de Dieu.” — *Fr.*

<sup>191</sup> for *coming to the school of God*, as if his meaning were this, Until God become my schoolmaster, and until I learn by his word what otherwise my mind, when I come to consider the government of the world, cannot comprehend, I stop short all at once, and understand nothing about the subject. When, therefore, we are here told that men are unfit for contemplating the arrangements of Divine Providence until they obtain wisdom elsewhere than from themselves, how can we attain to wisdom but by submissively receiving what God teaches us both by his Word and by his Holy Spirit? David by the word *sanctuary* alludes to the external manner of teaching, which God had appointed among his ancient people; but along with the Word he comprehends the secret illumination of the Holy Spirit.

By the *end* of the wicked is not meant their exit from the world, or their departure from the present life, which is seen of all men — for what need was there to enter into the sanctuaries of God to understand that? — but the word *end* is to be regarded as referring to the judgments of God, by which he makes it manifest that, even when he is commonly thought to be asleep, he only delays to a convenient time the execution of the punishment which the wicked deserve. This must be explained at greater length. If we would learn from God what is the condition of the ungodly, he teaches us, that after having flourished for some short time, they suddenly decay; and that although they may happen to enjoy a continued course of prosperity until death, yet all that is nothing, since their life itself is nothing. As, then, God declares that all the wicked shall miserably perish, if we behold him executing manifest vengeance upon them in this life, let us remember that it is the judgment of God. If, on the contrary, we do not perceive any punishment inflicted on them in this world, let us beware of thinking that they have escaped, or that they are the objects of the Divine favor and approbation; <sup>192</sup> but let us rather suspend our judgment, since the end or the last day has not yet arrived. In short, if we would profit aright, when we address ourselves to the consideration of the works of God, we must first beseech him to open our eyes, (for these are sheer fools who would of themselves be clear-sighted, and of a penetrating judgment;) and, secondly, we must also give all due respect to his word, by assigning to it that authority to which it is entitled.

### Psalm 73:18-20

**18.** Surely thou hast set them in slippery places; thou shalt cast them down into destruction. **19.** How have they been destroyed, as it were in a moment! they have perished, they have been consumed with terrors. **20.** As it were a dream after a man is awakened: O Lord! in awaking, <sup>193</sup> thou wilt make their image to be despised, [or contemptible.]

<sup>191</sup> “It is remarkable,” observes Horsley, “that the original word for ‘sanctuary,’ in this place, is plural, which is unexampled when the sanctuary is literally meant.” He considers the expression, “Until I went into the sanctuary of God,” as meaning, “Till I entered into the secret grounds of God’s dealings with mankind.” Cresswell explains it — “Until I entered into the grounds of God’s dealings with men, as explained by the sacred writings, which are laid up in the place dedicated to his worship.”

<sup>192</sup> “Gardons-nous de penser qu’ils soyent eschappez, ou que Dieu leur favorise.” — *Fr.*

<sup>193</sup> Martin thinks that there is here an allusion to the time at which judicial sentences were pronounced, which was in the morning, when men awoke from the sleep of night.

**18.** *Surely thou hast set them in slippery places.* David, having now gone through his conflicts, begins, if we may use the expression, to be a new man; and he speaks with a quiet and composed mind, being, as it were, elevated on a watchtower, from which he obtained a clear and distinct view of things which before were hidden from him. It was the prophet Habakkuk's resolution to take such a position, and, by his example, he prescribes this to us as a remedy in the midst of troubles — "I will stand upon my watch," says he, "and set me upon the tower," (Habakkuk 2:1.) David, therefore, shows how much advantage is to be derived from approaching God. I now see, says he, how thou proceedest in thy providence; for, although the ungodly continue to stand for a brief season, yet they are, as it were, perched on slippery places,<sup>194</sup> that they may fall ere long into destruction. Both the verbs of this verse are in the past tense; but the first, *to set them in slippery places*, is to be understood of the present time, as if it had been said, — God for a short period thus lifts them up on high, that when they fall their fall may be the heavier. This, it is true, seems to be the lot of the righteous as well as of the wicked; for everything in this world is slippery, uncertain, and changeable. But as true believers depend upon heaven, or rather, as the power of God is the foundation on which they rest, it is not said of them that they are set in slippery places, notwithstanding the frailty and uncertainty which characterises their condition in this world. What although they stumble or even fall, the Lord has his hand under them to sustain and strengthen them when they stumble, and to raise them up when they are fallen. The uncertainty of the condition of the ungodly, or, as it is here expressed, their slippery condition, proceeds from this, that they take pleasure in contemplating their own power and greatness, and admire themselves on that account, just like a person who would walk at leisure upon ice;<sup>195</sup> and thus by their infatuated presumption, they prepare themselves for falling down headlong. We are not to picture to our imaginations a wheel of fortune, which, as it revolves, embroils all things in confusion; but we must admit the truth to which the prophet here adverts, and which he tells us is made known to all the godly in the sanctuary, that there is a secret providence of God which manages all the affairs of the world. On this subject my readers, if they choose, may peruse the beautiful verses of Claudian in his first book against Ruffinus.

**19.** *How have they been destroyed, as it were in a moment!* The language of wonder in which the Psalmist breaks forth serves much to confirm the sentiment of the preceding verse. As the consideration of the prosperity of the ungodly induces a torpor upon our minds, yea, even renders them stupid; so their destruction, being sudden and unlooked for, tends the more effectually to awaken us, each being thus constrained to inquire how such an event came to pass, which all men thought could never happen. The prophet, therefore, speaks of it in the way of interrogation, as of a thing incredible. Yet he, at the same time, thus teaches us that God is daily working in such a manner as that, if we would but open our eyes, there would be presented to us just matter for exciting our astonishment. Nay, rather, if by faith we would look from a distance at the judgments of God daily approaching nearer and nearer, nothing would happen which we would regard as strange or difficult to be believed; for the surprise which we feel proceeds from the slowness and carelessness with which we proceed in acquiring the knowledge of Divine truth.<sup>196</sup> When it is said, *They are*

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<sup>194</sup> "Comme juntez en lieux glissans." — *Fr.*

<sup>195</sup> "Qu'ils prenent plaisir a contempler leur puissance et grandeur, et sy mirent, comme qui voudroit se pourmener a loisir sur la glace." — *Fr.*

<sup>196</sup> "De nostre tardivete et nonchalance a profiter en la doctrine." — *Fr.*

*consumed with terrors*, it may be understood in two ways. It either means that God thunders upon them in such an unusual manner, that the very strangeness of it strikes them with dismay; or that God, although he may not lay his hand upon his enemies, nevertheless throws them into consternation, and brings them to nothing, solely by the terror of his breath, at the very time when they are recklessly despising all dangers, as if they were perfectly safe, and had made a covenant with death.<sup>197</sup> Thus we have before seen David introducing them as encouraging themselves in their forwardness by this boasting language, “Who is lord over us?” (Psalm 12:4.) I am rather inclined to adopt the first sense; and the reason which leads me to do so is, that when God perceives that we are so slow in considering his judgments, he inflicts upon the ungodly judgments of a very severe kind, and pursues them with unusual tokens of his wrath, as if he would make the earth to tremble, in order thereby to correct our dullness of apprehension.

**20.** *As it were a dream after a man is awakened.* This similitude is often to be met with in the Sacred Writings. Thus, Isaiah, (Isaiah 29:7,) speaking of the enemies of the Church, says, “They shall be as a dream of a night vision.” To quote other texts of a similar kind would be tedious and unnecessary labor. In the passage before us the metaphor is very appropriate. How is it to be accounted for, that the prosperity of the wicked is regarded with so much wonder, but because our minds have been lulled into a deep sleep? and, in short, the pictures which we draw in our imaginations of the happiness of the wicked, and of the desirableness of their condition, are just like the imaginary kingdoms which we construct in our dreams when we are asleep. Those who, being illuminated by the Word of God, are awake, may indeed be in some degree impressed with the splendor with which the wicked are invested; but they are not so dazzled by it as thereby to have their wonder very much excited; for they are prevented from feeling in this manner by a light of an opposite kind far surpassing it in brilliancy and attraction. The prophet, therefore, commands us to awake, that we may perceive that all which we gaze at in this world is nothing else than pure vanity; even as he himself, now returning to his right mind, acknowledges that he had before been only dreaming and raving. The reason is added, because God *will make their image to be despised, or render it contemptible*. By the word *image* some understand the soul of man, because it was formed after the image of God. But in my opinion, this exposition is unsuitable; for the prophet simply derides the outward pomp or show<sup>198</sup> which dazzles the eyes of men, while yet it vanishes

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<sup>197</sup> “*They are utterly consumed with terrors*; their destruction is not only sudden, but entire; it is like the breaking in pieces of a potter’s vessel, a sherd of which cannot be gathered up and used; or like the casting of a millstone into the sea, which will never rise more: and this is done *with terrors*, — either by terrible judgments inflicted on them from without, or with terrors inwardly seizing upon their minds and consciences, as at the time of temporal calamities, or at death, and certainly at the judgment, when the awful sentence will be pronounced upon them. See Job 27:20.” — *Dr. Gill*.

<sup>198</sup> With this agree Bishop Horsley and Dr Adam Clarke. The former translates: —

“Like the dream of a man beginning to wake publicly,  
O Lord! thou renderest their vain show contemptible.”

The latter: —

“Like to a dream after one awaketh,  
So wilt thou, O Jehovah! when thou risest up,  
Destroy their shadowy grandeur.”

The original word, *tselem*, for *image*, means *likeness*, corporeal or incorporeal; and it agrees with *tselel*, a *shade*, because an image is, as if the shade or shadow of the body. See Bythner on Psalm 39:6. “It seems to be taken here,” says Hammond, “for that which hath a fantastical only in opposition to a real substantial being.” “The Hebrew term,” says Walford, “means an unsubstantial appearance, splendid while it continues, but which in an instant disappears.” The prosperity which wicked men for a time enjoy, their greatness, riches, honor, and happiness, however dazzling and imposing, is thus nothing more than an *image* or *shadow* of prosperity, an empty phantom; and within a short period it ceases to be even so much as a shadow, it

away in an instant. We have met with a similar form of expression in Psalm 39:6, “Surely every man passeth away in an image,” the import of which is, Surely every man flows away like water that has no solidity, or rather like the image reflected in the mirror which has no substance. The word *image*, then, in this passage means what we commonly term *appearance*, or *outward show*; and thus the prophet indirectly rebukes the error into which we fall, when we regard as real and substantial those things which are merely phantoms created out of nothing by our imaginations. The word *בַּיִת*, *bair*, properly signifies *in the city*.<sup>199</sup> But as this would be a rigid form of expression, it has been judiciously thought by many that the word is curtailed of a letter, and that it is the same as *בַּהַיִת*, *bahair*; an opinion which is also supported from the point *kamets* being placed under *ב*, *beth*. According to this view it is to be translated *in awakening*, that is, after these dreams which deceive us shall have passed away. And that takes place not only when God restores to some measure of order matters which before were involved in confusion, but also when dispelling the darkness he gladdens our minds with a friendly light. We never, it is true, see things so well adjusted in the world as we would desire; for God, with the view of keeping us always in the exercise of hope, delays the perfection of our state to the final day of judgment. But whenever he stretches forth his hand against the wicked, he causes us to see as it were some rays of the break of day, that the darkness, thickening too much, may not lull us asleep, and affect us with dullness of understanding.<sup>200</sup> Some apply this expression, *in awaking*, to the last judgment,<sup>201</sup> as if David intended to say, In this world the wicked abound in riches and power, and this confusion, which is as it were a dark night, will continue until God shall raise the dead. I certainly admit that this is a profitable doctrine; but it is not taught us in this place, the scope of the passage not at all agreeing with such an interpretation. If any prefer reading *in the city* — *in the city thou wilt make their image to be despised*, — the meaning will be, that when God is pleased to bring into contempt the transitory beauty and vain show of the wicked, it will not be a secret or hidden vengeance, but will be quite manifest and known to all, as if it were done in the public market place of a city. But the word *awaking* suits better, as it is put in opposition to *dreaming*.

## Psalm 73:21-24

**21.** For my heart was in a ferment, and I was pierced in my reins. **22.** And I was foolish and ignorant: I was with thee as a brute beast. **23.** Nevertheless I was continually with thee; thou didst

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absolutely vanishes and comes to nothing, convincing the good but afflicted man, to whom it seemed to involve in doubt the rectitude of the Divine government, what is its real character, and that it should never occasion any perplexity to the student of Divine Providence.

<sup>199</sup> The LXX. read, ἐν τῇ πόλει σου, “in thy city,” deriving the original word from *בַּיִת*, *ir*, a city. Such, also, is the reading of the Vulgate, Arabic, and Æthiopic versions. But the word comes from *ב*, *ur*, to awake, and is in the infinitive *hiph*, *beth*, excluding *he*, characteristic of the conjugation.

<sup>200</sup> “As a dream of one who awaketh. The thought here is, as a pleasing dream vanishes instantly on awaking, so the pleasures of these men will vanish, and show their unsubstantial nature, when God shall effect his righteous judgement.” — *Walford*. Then the prosperity of the wicked is seen to be fantastic, and to consist only of “such stuff as dreams are made of.”

<sup>201</sup> “The Chaldee in their paraphrase refer it to the day of judgment, when wicked men shall rise out of their graves, and God proceed in wrath against them, ( *בְּאַרְצָתָם*, ‘in fury shalt thou scorn or despise them,’ ) according to that expression of Daniel 12:2, ‘Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to shame and everlasting contempt.’” — *Hammond*

hold my right hand. **24.** Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel; and at length thou shalt take me to [or receive me into] glory.

**21.** *For my heart was in a ferment.* The Psalmist again returns to the confession which he had previously made, acknowledging that whilst he felt his heart pierced with perverse envy and emulation, he had complained against God, in a peevish or fretful manner. He compares his anger to *leaven*. Some translate, *My heart was steeped in vinegar*. But it is more suitable to explain the verb thus, *My heart was soured or swollen*, as dough is swollen by leaven. Thus Plautus, when speaking of a woman inflamed with anger, says that she is all in a ferment.<sup>202</sup> Some read the last clause of the verse, *My reins were pierced*; and they think that , *aleph*, in the beginning of the word, , *esh-tonan*, the verb for *pierced*, is put instead of , *he*;<sup>203</sup> but this makes little difference as to the sense. We know that the word , *kelayoth*, by which the Hebrews denote *the reins*, comes from the verb , *kalah*, which signifies *to desire, to covet earnestly*, this word being put for the reins, because it is said that the desires of man have their seat in that part of the body. David therefore declares that these perplexing and troublesome thoughts had been, as it were, thorns which pierced him.<sup>204</sup> We have already stated how he came to be affected with this pungent and burning vexation of spirit. We will find many worldly men who, although they deny that the world is governed by the Providence of God, yet do not greatly disquiet themselves, but only laugh at the freaks of Fortune. On the other hand, true believers, the more firmly they are persuaded that God is the judge of the world, are the more afflicted when his procedure does not correspond to their wishes.

**22.** *And I was foolish and ignorant.* David here rebuking himself sharply, as it became him to do, in the first place declares that he was foolish; secondly, he charges himself with ignorance; and, thirdly, he affirms that he resembled the brutes. Had he only acknowledged his ignorance, it might have been asked, Whence this vice or fault of ignorance proceeded? He therefore ascribes it to his own folly; and the more emphatically to express his folly, he compares himself to the lower animals. The amount is, that the perverse envy of which he has spoken arose from ignorance and error, and that the blame of having thus erred was to be imputed wholly to himself, inasmuch as he had lost a sound judgment and understanding, and that not after an ordinary manner, but even the length of being reduced to a state of brutish stupidity. What we have previously stated is undoubtedly true, that men never form a right judgment of the works of God; for when they apply their minds to consider them, all their faculties fail, being inadequate to the task; yet David justly lays the blame of failure upon himself, because, having lost the judgment of a man, he had fallen as it were into the rank of the brute creatures. Whenever we are dissatisfied with the manner of God's providence in governing the world, let us remember that this is to be traced to the perversity of our understanding. The Hebrew word , *immach*, which we have translated *with thee*, is here to be taken by way of comparison for *before thee*; as if David had said, — Lord, although I have seemed in this world to be endued with superior judgment and reason, yet in respect of thy celestial wisdom, I have been

<sup>202</sup> Plautus' words are, "Mea uxor tota in fermento jacet;" "My wife lies all in a ferment." In like manner he says, "Ecquid habet acetum in pectore?" "Has he any vinegar in his breast?"

<sup>203</sup> This is Kimchi's and Houbigant's opinion.

<sup>204</sup> "The Hebrew verb [for *pierced*] indicates the acute pain felt from a sharp weapon. (See Parkhurst, on , iv.) Common experience shows that the workings of the mind, particularly the passions of joy, grief, and fear, have a very remarkable effect on the reins or kidneys." — *Mant*



as one of the lower animals. It is with the highest propriety that he has inserted this particle. To what is it owing, that men are so deceived by their own folly, as we find them to be, if it is not to this, that while they look at each other, they all inwardly flatter themselves? Among the blind, each thinks that he has one eye, in other words, that he excels the rest; or, at least, he pleases himself with the reflection, that his fellows are in no respect superior to himself in wisdom. But when persons come to God, and compare themselves with him, this prevailing error, in which all are fast asleep, can find no place.

**23** *Nevertheless I was continually with thee.*<sup>205</sup> Here the Psalmist declares, in a different sense, that he was *with God*. He gives him thanks for having kept him from utterly falling, when he was in so great danger of being precipitated into destruction. The greatness of the favor to which he adverts is the more strikingly manifested from the confession which he made a little before, that he was bereft of judgment, and, as it were, a brute beast; for he richly deserved to be cast off by *God*, when he dared to murmur against him. Men are said to be with God in two ways; either, first, in respect of apprehension and thought, when they are persuaded that they live in his presence, are governed by his hand, and sustained by his power; or, secondly, when God, unperceived by them, puts upon them a bridle, by which, when they go astray, he secretly restrains them, and prevents them from totally apostatising from him. When a man therefore imagines that God exercises no care about him, he is not *with God*, as to his own feeling or apprehension; but still that man, if he is not forsaken, abides with God, inasmuch as God's secret or hidden grace continues with him. In short, God is always near his chosen ones; for although they sometimes turn their backs upon him, he nevertheless has always his fatherly eye turned towards them. When the Psalmist speaks of God as *holding him by the right hand*, he means that he was, by the wonderful power of God, drawn back from that deep gulf into which the reprobate cast themselves. He then ascribes it wholly to the grace of God that he was enabled to restrain himself from breaking forth into open blasphemies, and from hardening himself in error, and that he was also brought to condemn himself of foolishness; — this he ascribes wholly to the grace of God, who stretched out his hand to hold him up, and prevent him from a fall which would have involved him in destruction. From this we see how precious our salvation is in the sight of God; for when we wander far from him, he yet continues to look upon us with a watchful eye, and to stretch forth his hand to bring us to himself. We must indeed beware of perverting this doctrine by making it a pretext for slothfulness; but experience nevertheless teaches us, that when we are sunk in drowsiness and insensibility, God exercises a care about us, and that even when we are fugitives and wanderers from him, he is still near us. The force of the metaphor contained in the language, which represents God as *holding us by the right hand*, is to be particularly noticed; for there is no temptation, let it be never so slight, which would not easily overthrow us, were we not upheld and sustained by the power of God. The reason then why we do not succumb, even in the severest conflicts, is nothing else than because we receive the aid of the Holy Spirit. He does not indeed always put forth his power in us in an evident and striking manner, (for he often perfects it in our weakness;) but it is enough that he succours us, although we may be ignorant and unconscious of it, that he upholds us when we stumble, and even lifts us up when we have fallen.

**24.** *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel.* As the verbs are put in the future tense, the natural meaning, in my opinion, is, that the Psalmist assured himself that the Lord, since by his leading he

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<sup>205</sup> “Notwithstanding these foolish thoughts, I am under the care of thy good providence.” — *Patrick*.

had now brought him back into the right way, would continue henceforth to guide him, until at length he received him into His glorious presence in heaven. We know that it is David's usual way, when he gives thanks to God, to look forward with confidence to the future. Accordingly, after having acknowledged his own infirmities, he celebrated the grace of God, the aid and comfort of which he had experienced; and now he cherishes the hope that the Divine assistance will continue hereafter to be extended to him. *Guidance by counsel* is put first. Although the foolish and inconsiderate are sometimes very successful in their affairs, (for God remedies our faults and errors, and turns to a prosperous and happy issue things which we had entered upon amiss;) yet the way in which God ordinarily and more abundantly blesses his own people is by giving them wisdom: and we should ask him especially to govern us by the Spirit of counsel and of judgment. Whoever dares, in a spirit of confident reliance on his own wisdom, to engage in any undertaking, will inevitably be involved in confusion and shame for his presumption, since he arrogates to himself what is peculiar to God alone. If David needed to have God for his guide, how much more need have we of being under the Divine guidance? *To counsel* there is added *glory*, which, I think, ought not to be limited to eternal life, as some are inclined to do. It comprehends the whole course of our happiness from the commencement, which is seen here upon earth, even to the consummation which we expect to realize in heaven. David then assures himself of eternal glory, through the free and unmerited favor of God, and yet he does not exclude the blessings which God bestows upon his people here below, with the view of affording them, even in this life, some foretaste of that felicity.

### Psalm 73:25-28

**25.** Who is there to me in heaven? <sup>206</sup> And I have desired none other with thee <sup>207</sup> upon the earth. **26.** My flesh and my heart have failed: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. **27.** For, lo: they who depart from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all those who go a whoring from thee. <sup>208</sup> **28.** As for me, it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord Jehovah, that I may recount all thy works. <sup>209</sup>

**25.** *Whom have I in heaven but thee?* The Psalmist shows more distinctly how much he had profited in the sanctuary of God; for being satisfied with him alone, he rejects every other object, except God, which presented itself to him. The form of expression which he employs, when he joins together an interrogation and an affirmation, is quite common in the Hebrew tongue, although harsh in other languages. As to the meaning, there is no ambiguity. David declares that he desires nothing, either in heaven or in earth, except God alone, and that without God, all other objects

<sup>206</sup> Calvin here gives the literal rendering of the original Hebrew. The question appears elliptical; and accordingly, in the French version he has introduced the supplement, "si non toy?" "but thee?" — "Who is there to me in heaven but thee?"

<sup>207</sup> "C'est, outre toy." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, beyond or besides thee."

<sup>208</sup> "Ascavoir, en te delaissant." — *Fr. marg.* "Namely, in forsaking thee."

<sup>209</sup> The Septuagint here adds, ἐν ταῖς πύλαις της θυγατρὸς Σιών; "in the gates of the daughter of Zion." The Vulgate, Arabic, and Æthiopic versions have the same addition. This seems to make a better conclusion; but these words are not in our present copies of the Hebrew Bible, nor are they supported by any of the MSS. yet collated.

which usually draw the hearts of men towards them were unattractive to him. And, undoubtedly, God then obtains from us the glory to which he is entitled, when, instead of being carried first to one object, and then to another, we hold exclusively by him, being satisfied with him alone. If we give the smallest portion of our affections to the creatures, we in so far defraud God of the honor which belongs to him. And yet nothing has been more common in all ages than this sacrilege, and it prevails too much at the present day. How small is the number of those who keep their affections fixed on God alone! We see how superstition joins to him many others as rivals for our affections. While the Papists admit in word that all things depend upon God, they are, nevertheless, constantly seeking to obtain help from this and the other quarter independent of him. Others, puffed up with pride, have the effrontery to associate either themselves or other men with God. On this account we ought the more carefully to attend to this doctrine, That it is unlawful for us to desire any other object besides God. By the words *heaven and earth* the Psalmist denotes every conceivable object; but, at the same time, he seems purposely to point to these two in particular. In saying that he sought none in heaven but God only, he rejects and renounces all the false gods with which, through the common error and folly of mankind, heaven has been filled. When he affirms that he desires none on the earth besides God, he has, I suppose, a reference to the deceits and illusions with which almost the whole world is intoxicated; for those who are not beguiled by the former artifice of Satan, so as to be led to fabricate for themselves false gods, either deceive themselves by arrogance when confiding in their own skill, or strength, or prudence, they usurp the prerogatives which belong to God alone; or else trepan themselves with deceitful allurements when they rely upon the favor of men, or confide in their own riches and other helps which they possess. If, then, we would seek God aright, we must beware of going astray into various by-paths, and divested of all superstition and pride, must betake ourselves directly and exclusively to Him. This is the only way of seeking him. The expression, *I have desired none other with thee*, amounts to this: I know that thou by thyself, apart from every other object, art sufficient, yea, more than sufficient for me, and therefore I do not suffer myself to be carried away after a variety of desires, but rest in and am fully contented with thee. In short, that we may be satisfied with God alone, it is of importance for us to know the plenitude of the blessings which he offers for our acceptance.

**26.** *My flesh and my heart have failed.* Some understand the first part of the verse as meaning that David's heart and flesh failed him through the ardent desire with which he was actuated; and they think that by it he intends to testify the earnestness with which he applied his mind to God. We meet with a similar form of expression elsewhere; but the clause immediately succeeding, *God is the strength of my heart*, seems to require that it should be explained differently. I am rather disposed to think that there is here a contrast between the *failing* which David felt in himself and the *strength* with which he was divinely supplied; as if he had said, Separated from God I am nothing, and all that I attempt to do ends in nothing; but when I come to him, I find an abundant supply of strength. It is highly necessary for us to consider what we are without God; for no man will cast himself wholly upon God, but he who feels himself in a fainting condition, and who despairs of the sufficiency of his own powers. We will seek nothing from God but what we are conscious of wanting in ourselves. Indeed, all men confess this, and the greater part think that all which is necessary is that God should aid our infirmities, or afford us succor when we have not the means of adequately relieving ourselves. But the confession of David is far more ample than this when he lays, so to speak, his own nothingness before God. He, therefore, very properly adds, that *God is his portion*. The portion of an individual is a figurative expression, employed in Scripture

to denote the condition or lot with which every man is contented. Accordingly, the reason why God is represented as a portion is, because he alone is abundantly sufficient for us, and because in him the perfection of our happiness consists. Whence it follows, that we are chargeable with ingratitude, if we turn away our minds from him and fix them on any other object, as has been stated in Psalm 16:4, where David explains more clearly the import of the metaphor. Some foolishly assert that God is called our *portion*, because our soul is taken from him. I know not how such a silly conceit has found its way into their brains; for it is as far from David's meaning as heaven is from the earth, and it involves in it the wild notion of the Manicheans, with which Servetus was bewitched. But it generally happens that men who are not exercised in the Scriptures, nor imbued with sound theology, although well acquainted with the Hebrew language, yet err and fall into mistakes even in first principles. Under the word *heart* the Psalmist comprehends the whole soul. He does not, however, mean, when he speaks of *the heart failing*, that the essence or substance of the soul fails, but that all the powers which God in his goodness has bestowed upon it, and the use of which it retains only so long as he pleases, fall into decay.

**27.** *For, lo! they who depart from thee shall perish.* Here he proves, by an argument taken from things contrary, that nothing was better for him than simply to repose himself upon God alone; for no sooner does any one depart from God than he inevitably falls into the most dreadful destruction. All depart from him who divide and scatter their hope among a variety of objects. The phrase *to go a whoring* <sup>210</sup> is of similar import; for it is the worst kind of adultery to divide our heart that it may not continue fixed exclusively upon God. This will be more easily understood by defining the spiritual chastity of our minds, which consists in faith, in calling upon God, in integrity of heart, and in obedience to the Word. Whoever then submits not himself to the Word of God, that feeling him to be the sole author of all good things, he may depend upon him, surrender himself to be governed by him, betake himself to him at all times, and devote to him all his affections, such a person is like an adulterous woman who leaves her own husband, and prostitutes herself to strangers. David's language then is equivalent to his pronouncing all apostates who revolt from God to be adulterers.

**28.** *As for me, it is good for me to draw near to God.* Literally the reading is, *And I, etc.* David speaking expressly of himself, affirms that although he should see all mankind in a state of estrangement from God, and wandering after the ever-changing errors and superstitions of the world, he would nevertheless study to continue always in a state of nearness to God. Let others perish, says he, if their headstrong passions cannot be restrained, and they themselves prevented from running after the deceits of the world; but *as for me*, I will continue steadfast in the resolution of maintaining a sacred communion with God. In the subsequent clause he informs us that we draw near to God in a right manner when our confidence continues firmly fixed in him. God will not hold us by his right hand unless we are fully persuaded of the impossibility of our continuing steadfast and safe in any other way than by his grace alone. This passage is worthy of notice, that we may not be carried away by evil examples, to join ourselves to the wicked, and to act as they do, although even the whole world should fall into unbelief; but that we may learn to gather in our affections from other objects, and to confine them exclusively to God. In the close, the Psalmist

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<sup>210</sup> “Go a whoring, etc.; i.e., forsake God for false gods, which is spiritual adultery.” — *Sutcliffe*. When God is said to have *destroyed* such as do this, some think there is an allusion to that part of the Mosaic law which doomed idolaters to be punished with death, as guilty of high treason against Jehovah the King of Israel.

intimates that after he shall have devoted himself to God alone, he shall never want matter for praising him, since God never disappoints the hope which his people repose in him. From this it follows, that none curse God or murmur against him, but those who wilfully shut their eyes and involve themselves in darkness, lest knowing and observing his providence, they should be induced to give themselves up to his faithfulness and protection.

## PSALM 74

The people of God in this psalm bewail the desolate condition of the Church, which was such that the very name of Israel was almost annihilated. It appears from their humble supplications that they impute to their own sins all the calamities which they endured; but at the same time they lay before God his own covenant by which he adopted the race of Abraham as his peculiar people. Afterwards they call to remembrance how mightily and gloriously he had in the days of old displayed his power in delivering his Church. Encouraging themselves from this consideration, they beseech Him that he would at length come to their aid, and remedy a state of matters so deplorable and desperate.

### *An instruction of Asaph.*

The inscription , *maskil*, agrees very well with the subject of the psalm; for although it is sometimes applied to subjects of a joyful description, as we have seen in the forty-fifth psalm, yet it generally indicates that the subject treated of is the divine judgments, by which men are compelled to descend into themselves, and to examine their own sins, that they may humble themselves before God. It is easy to gather from the contents of the psalm, that its composition cannot be ascribed to David; for in his time there was no ground for mourning over such a wasted and calamitous condition of the Church as is here depicted. Those who are of a different opinion allege, that David by the spirit of prophecy foretold what had not yet come to pass. But as it is probable that there are many of the psalms which were composed by different authors after the death of David, this psalm, I have no doubt, is one of their number. What calamity is here spoken of, it is not easy precisely to determine. On this point there are two opinions. Some suppose that the reference is to that period of Jewish history when the city and the temple were destroyed, and when the people were carried away captives to Babylon under king Nebuchadnezzar; <sup>211</sup> and others, that it relates to the period when the temple was profaned, under Antiochus Epiphanes. There is some plausibility in both these opinions. From the fact that the faithful here complain of being now without signs and prophets, the latter opinion would seem the more probable; for it is well known that many prophets flourished when the people were carried into captivity. On the other hand, when it is said a little before that the sanctuaries were burnt to ashes, the carved works destroyed, and that nothing remained entire, these statements do not apply to the cruelty and tyranny of Antiochus. He indeed shamefully polluted the temple, by introducing into it heathen superstitions; but the building itself continued uninjured, and the timber and stones were not at that time consumed with fire. Some maintain that by *sanctuaries* we are to understand *the synagogues* in which the Jews were accustomed to hold their holy assemblies, not only at Jerusalem, but also in the other cities of Judea. It is also a supposable case, that the faithful beholding the awful desecration of the temple by Antiochus, were led from so melancholy a spectacle to carry their thoughts back to the time when it was burnt by the Chaldeans, and that they comprehend the two calamities in one description. Thus the conjecture

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<sup>211</sup> This is the opinion of Calmet, Poole, Wells, Mant, Walford, and others. "A melancholy occasion," says Mant, "commemorated by an elegy of corresponding tenderness and plaintiveness. It would be difficult to name a finer specimen of elegiac poetry than this pathetic psalm of Asaph." If it was composed during the Babylonish captivity, and if Asaph, whose name is in the title, was the author of it, he must have been a different person from David's contemporary, previously noticed, (volume 2, page 257, note,) — probably a descendant of the same name and family. Dr Gill thinks that he was the Asaph of the time of David, and supposes that under the influence of the spirit of prophecy, he might speak of the sufferings of the Church in after ages, just as David and others testified before-hand of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow.

will be more probable that these complaints belong to the time of Antiochus;<sup>212</sup> for the Church of God was then without prophets. If, however, any would rather refer it to the Babylonish captivity, it will be an easy matter to solve this difficulty; for although Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, were then alive, yet we know that they were silent for a time, as if they had finished the course of their vocation, until at length Daniel, a little before the day of their deliverance, again came forth for the purpose of inspiring the poor exiles with courage to return to their own country. To this the prophet Isaiah seems to have an eye, when he says in the fortieth chapter (Isaiah 40:1) of his prophecies at the beginning, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, will your God say.” The verb, which is there in the future tense, shows that the prophets were enjoined to hold their peace for a time.

### Psalm 74:1-8

**1.** O God! why hast thou cast us off for ever? why doth thy anger smoke against the flock of thy pastures? **2.** Remember thy congregation, which thou hast possessed of old, the rod of thy inheritance which thou hast redeemed, this mount Zion on which thou hast dwelt. **3.** Lift up thy strokes to destroy for ever every enemy that worketh mischief to thy sanctuary. **4.** Thy adversaries have roared<sup>213</sup> in the midst of thy sanctuaries; they have set up their signs for signs. **5.** He who lifted up the axes upon the thick trees was renowned as doing an excellent work. **6.** And now they break in pieces the carved work thereof with axes and hammers together. **7.** They have set on fire thy sanctuaries; they have polluted the dwelling-place of thy name, levelling it with the ground. **8.** They have said in their heart, Let us destroy them all together: they have burned all the tabernacles of God in the land.

**1.** *O God! why hast thou east us off for ever?* If this complaint was written when the people were captives in Babylon, although Jeremiah had assigned the 70th year of their captivity as the period of their deliverance, it is not wonderful that waiting so long was to them a very bitter affliction, that they daily groaned under it, and that so protracted a period seemed to them like an eternity. As to those who were persecuted by the cruelty of Antiochus, they might, not without reason, complain of the wrath of God being perpetual, from their want of information as to any definite time when this persecution would terminate; and especially when they saw the cruelty of their enemies daily increasing without any hope of relief, and that their condition was constantly proceeding from bad to worse. Having been before this greatly reduced by the many disastrous wars, which their neighbors one after another had waged against them, they were now brought almost to the brink of utter destruction. It is to be observed, that the faithful, when persecuted by the heathen nations, lifted up their eyes to God, as if all the evils which they suffered had been inflicted by his hand alone. They were convinced, that had not God been angry with them, the heathen nations would not have been permitted to take such license in injuring them. Being persuaded, then, that they were not encountering merely the opposition of flesh and blood, but that they were afflicted by the just judgment of God, they direct their thoughts to the true cause of all their calamities, which was, that God, under whose favor they had formerly lived prosperous and happy, had cast them off, and

<sup>212</sup> Rosenmüller is of opinion that this is the period referred to. “For my part,” says Dr Geddes, “I think it must have been composed during the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes; and the best commentary on it is the first chapter of the first book of Maccabees. The author may have been Mattathias.”

<sup>213</sup> “Ont rugi comme lions.” — *Fr.* “Have roared like lions.”

deigned no longer to account them as his flock. The verb *zanach*, signifies *to reject and detest*, and sometimes also *to withdraw one's self to a distance*. It is of no great moment in which of these senses it is here taken. We may consider the amount of what is stated as simply this, that whenever we are visited with adversities, these are not the arrows of fortune thrown against us at a venture, but the scourges or rods of God which, in his secret and mysterious providence, he prepares and makes use of for chastising our sins. *Casting off* and *anger* must here be referred to the apprehension or judgment of the flesh. Properly speaking, God is not angry with his elect, whose diseases he cures by afflictions as it were by medicines; but as the chastisements which we experience powerfully tend to produce in our minds apprehensions of his wrath, the Holy Spirit, by the word *anger*, admonishes the faithful to acknowledge their guilt in the presence of infinite purity. When, therefore, God executes his vengeance upon us, it is our duty seriously to reflect on what we have deserved, and to consider, that although He is not subject to the emotions of anger, yet it is not owing to us, who have grievously offended him by our sins, that his anger is not kindled against us. Moreover, his people, as a plea for obtaining mercy, flee to the remembrance of the covenant by which they were adopted to be his children. In calling themselves *the flock of God's pastures*, they magnify his free choice of them by which they were separated from the Gentiles. This they express more plainly in the following verse.

2. *Remember thy congregation, which thou hast possessed of old.*<sup>214</sup> Here they boast of having been the peculiar people of God, not on account of any merit of their own, but by the grace of adoption. They boast in like manner of their antiquity, — that they are not subjects who have come under the government of God only within a few months ago, but such as had fallen to him by right of inheritance. The longer the period during which he had continued his love towards the seed of Abraham, the more fully was their faith confirmed. They declare, therefore, that they had been God's people from the beginning, that is, ever since he had entered into an inviolable covenant with Abraham. There is also added the redemption by which the adoption was ratified; for God did not only signify by word, but also showed by deed at the time when this redemption was effected, that he was their King and Protector. These benefits which they had received from God they set before themselves as an encouragement to their trusting in him, and they recount them before him, the benefactor who bestowed them, as an argument with him not to forsake the work of his own hands. Inspired with confidence by the same benefits, they call themselves *the rod of his inheritance*; that is to say, the heritage which he had measured out for himself. The allusion is to the custom which then prevailed of measuring or marking out the boundaries of grounds with poles as with cords or lines. Some would rather translate the word *shebet*, which we have rendered *rod*, by *tribe*; but I prefer the other translation, taking the meaning to be, that God separated Israel from the other nations to be his own proper ground, by the secret pre-ordination which originated in his own good pleasure, as by a measuring rod. In the last place, the temple in which God had promised to dwell is mentioned; not that his essence was enclosed in that place, — an observation which has already been frequently made, — but because his people experienced that there he was near at hand, and present with them by his power and grace. We now clearly perceive whence the people derived confidence in prayer; it was from God's free election and promises, and from the sacred worship which had been set up among them.

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<sup>214</sup> Archbishop Secker thinks that this verse may be read thus: "Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased, hast redeemed of old; the tribe of thine inheritance; this mount Zion," etc.



**3. *Lift up thy strokes.*** Here the people of God, on the other hand, beseech him to inflict a deadly wound upon their enemies, corresponding to the cruelty with which they had raged against his sanctuary. They would intimate, that a moderate degree of punishment was not sufficient for such impious and sacrilegious fury; and that, therefore, those who had shown themselves such violent enemies of the temple and of the worshippers of God should be completely destroyed, their impiety being altogether desperate. As the Holy Spirit has dictated this form of prayer, we may infer from it, in the first place, the infinite love which God bears towards us, when he is pleased to punish so severely the wrongs inflicted upon us; and, in the second place, the high estimation in which he holds the worship yielded to his Divine majesty, when he pursues with such rigour those who have violated it. With respect to the words, some translate *phamim*, which we have rendered *strokes*, by *feet* or *steps*,<sup>215</sup> and understand the Church as praying that the Lord would lift up his feet, and run swiftly to strike her enemies. Others translate it *hammers*,<sup>216</sup> which suits very well. I have, however, no hesitation in following the opinion of those who consider the reference to be to the act of striking, and that the strokes themselves are denoted. The last clause of the verse is explained by some as meaning that the enemy had corrupted all things in the sanctuary.<sup>217</sup> But as this construction is not to be found elsewhere, I would not depart from the received and approved reading.

**4. *Thy adversaries have roared in the midst of thy sanctuaries.*** Here the people of God compare their enemies to lions, (Amos 3:8,) to point out the cruelty which they exercised even in the very sanctuaries of God.<sup>218</sup> In this passage we are to understand the temple of Jerusalem as spoken of rather than the Jewish synagogues; nor is it any objection to this interpretation that the temple is here called in the plural number *sanctuaries*, as is frequently the case in other places, it being so called because it was divided into three parts. If any, however, think it preferable to consider synagogues as intended, I would not dispute the point. Yea, without any impropriety, it may be extended to the whole land, which God had consecrated to himself. But the language is much more emphatic when we consider the temple as meant. It thus intimates, that the rage of the enemy was so unbounded and indiscriminate that they did not even spare the temple of God. When it is said,

<sup>215</sup> “That *phamim* means *feet* or *steps* is evident from Psalms 17:5 57:6; and 58:10 *Lift up thy feet*, advance not slowly or by stealth, but with large and stately steps, full in the view of all; come to thy sanctuary, so long suffered to lie waste; examine what has been done there, and let thy grace and aid, hitherto so much withheld, be extended to us.” — *Gejer* *To lift up the feet* is a Hebraism for “to put one’s self in motion;” “to set out on a journey,” as may be learned from Genesis 29:1, where of Jacob it is said, “He lifted up his feet, and went into the east country.” Lifting up the feet is used for going, in the same way as opening the mouth is for speaking.

<sup>216</sup> “There is another notion of *phamim*, for a *mallet* or *hammer*, Isaiah 41:7 and Kimchi would have that to be the meaning here, ‘lift up thy mallet,’ in opposition to the ‘axes and hammers,’ verse 6; and thus also Abu Walid, ‘lift up thy dashing instruments.’ And the LXX., who read, *ἔπαρον τὰς χεῖρας*, ‘lift up thy hands,’ come near this.” — *Hammond*

<sup>217</sup> This is the sense put upon the words by some Jewish interpreters. Thus Abu Walid reads, “Lift up thy dashing instruments, because of the utter destructions which the enemy hath made, and because of all the evil that he hath done in *or* on the sanctuary.” Aben Ezra has, “because of the perpetual desolations,” that is, because of thy inheritance which is laid waste. Piscator takes the same view: “Betake thyself to Jerusalem, that thou mayest see these perpetual desolations which the Babylonians have wrought.” In like manner, Gejer, who observes that this sense is preferable to that which considers the words as a prayer, that God would lift up his feet for the perpetual ruin of the enemy, because the Psalmist has been hitherto occupied with a mere description of misery, and has used nothing of the language of imprecation. But the Chaldee has, “Lift up thy goings *or* footsteps, to make desolate the nations for ever;” that is, Come and spread desolation among those enemies who have invaded and so cruelly reduced thy sanctuary to ruins.

<sup>218</sup> Instead of songs of praise and other acts of devotion, nothing was now heard in the Jewish places of worship but profane vociferation, and the tumultuous noise of a heathen army. This is with great beauty and effect compared to the roaring of a lion.

*They have set up their signs,* <sup>219</sup> this serves to show their insulting and contemptuous conduct, that in erecting their standards they proudly triumphed even over God himself. Some explain this of magical divinations, <sup>220</sup> even as Ezekiel testifies, (Ezekiel 21:21, 22,) that Nebuchadnezzar sought counsel from the flight and the voice of birds; but this sense is too restricted. The explanation which I have given may be viewed as very suitable. Whoever entered into the Holy Land knew that the worship of God which flourished there was of a special character, and different from that which was performed in any other part of the world: <sup>221</sup> the temple was a token of the presence of God, and by it he seemed, as if with banners displayed, to hold that people under his authority and dominion. With these symbols, which distinguished the chosen tribes from the heathen nations, the prophet here contrasts the sacrilegious standards which their enemies had brought into the temple. <sup>222</sup> By repeating the word *signs* twice, he means to aggravate the abominable nature of their act; for having thrown down the tokens and ensigns of the true service of God, they set up in their stead strange symbols.

5. *He who lifted up the axe upon the thick trees was renowned.* The prophet again aggravates still more the barbarous and brutal cruelty of the enemies of his countrymen, from the circumstance, that they savagely demolished an edifice which had been built at such vast expense, which was embellished with such beauty and magnificence, and finished with so great labor and art. There is some obscurity in the words; but the sense in which they are almost universally understood is, that when the temple was about to be built, those who cut and prepared the wood required for it were in great reputation and renown. Some take the verb *mebi*, in an active sense, and explain the words as meaning that the persons spoken of were illustrious and well known, as if they had offered sacrifices to God. *The thickness of the trees* is set in opposition to the polished beams, to show the more clearly with what exquisite art the rough and unwrought timber was brought into a form of the greatest beauty and magnificence. Or the prophet means, what I am inclined to think is the more correct interpretation, that in the thick forests, where there was vast abundance of wood, great care was taken in the selection of the trees, that none might be cut down but such as were of the very best quality. May it not perhaps be understood in this sense, That in these thick forests the trees to which the axe was to be applied were well known and marked, as being already of great height, and exposed to the view of beholders? Whatever may be as to this, the prophet, there is no doubt, in this verse commends the excellence of the material which was selected with such care, and was so exquisite, that it attracted the gaze and excited the admiration of all who saw it; even as in the following verse, by the *carved* or *graven work* is meant the beauty of the building, which was finished with unequalled art. But now it is declared, that the Chaldeans, with utter recklessness,

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<sup>219</sup> Hammond reads, "They set up their ensigns for trophies." The original word both for *ensigns* and *trophies* is *oth*. But he observes that it requires here to be differently translated. *oth*, signifies a *sign*, and thence a *military standard* or *ensign*. The setting up of this in any place which has been taken by arms, is a token or sign of the victory achieved; and, accordingly, an ensign or standard thus set up becomes a *trophy*. To convey, therefore, the distinctive meaning, he contends that it is necessary in this passage to give different renderings to the same word.

<sup>220</sup> That is, they understand *signs* to mean such *signs* as diviners or soothsayers were wont to give, by which to foretell things to come. Jarchi, who adopts this interpretation, gives this sense: That the enemies of God's people having completed their conquest according to the auspices or signs of soothsayers, were fully convinced that these signs were real signs; in other words, that the art of divination was true.

<sup>221</sup> "Qu'il y avoit un service divine special et different de ce qui se faisoit ailleurs." — *Fr.*

<sup>222</sup> "Their own symbols they have set for signs. Profane representations, no doubt, agreeable to their own worship. See 1 Maccabees 1:47." — *Dr Geddes.*

made havoc with their axes upon this splendid edifice, as if it had been their object to tread under foot the glory of God by destroying so magnificent a structure.<sup>223</sup>

7. *They have set fire to thy sanctuaries.* The Psalmist now complains that the temple was burned, and thus completely razed and destroyed, whereas it was only half demolished by the instruments of war. Many have supposed that the order of the words has been here inverted,<sup>224</sup> not being able to perceive how a suitable meaning could be elicited from them, and therefore would resolve them thus, *They have put fire into thy sanctuaries.* I have, however, no doubt that the sense which I have given, although the accent is against it, is the true and natural one, That the temple was levelled with the ground by being burned. This verse corroborates more fully the statement which I have made, that the temple is called *sanctuaries* in the plural number, because it consisted of three parts, — the innermost sanctuary, the middle sanctuary, and the outer court; for there immediately follows the expression, *The dwelling-place of thy name.* The name of God is here employed to teach us that his essence was not confined to or shut up in the temple, but that he dwelt in it by his power and operation, that the people might there call upon him with the greater confidence.

8. *They have said in their heart, Let us destroy them all together.* To express the more forcibly the atrocious cruelty of the enemies of the Church, the prophet introduces them speaking together, and exciting one another to commit devastation without limit or measure. His language implies, that each of them, as if they had not possessed enough of courage to do mischief, stirred up and stimulated his fellow to waste and destroy the whole of God's people, without leaving so much as one of them. In the close of the verse he asserts that all the synagogues were burned. I readily take the Hebrew word *moadim*, in the sense of *synagogues*,<sup>225</sup> because he says *ALL the sanctuaries*, and speaks expressly *of the whole land.* It is a frigid explanation which is given by some, that these enemies, upon finding that they could not hurt or do violence to the sanctuary of God in heaven,

<sup>223</sup> In the English Common Prayer-Book the 5th and 6th verses are translated thus: — “He that hewed timber afore out of the thick trees was known to bring it to an excellent work. But now they break down all the carved work thereof with axes and hammers.” Dr Nicholls' paraphrase of this is as follows: “It is well known from the sacred records of our nation to what admirable beauty the skillful hand of the artificers brought the rough cedar trees, which were cut down by the hatchets of Hiram's woodmen in the thick Tyrian forests. But now they tear down all the curious carvings, that cost so much time and exquisite labor, with axes and hammers, and other rude instruments of iron.” “This is a clear and consistent sense of the passages” says Mant, “and affords a striking and well imagined contrast.”

<sup>224</sup> The order of the words is this, *shilchu baesh mikdashecha*, literally, “They have sent into fire thy sanctuary.”

<sup>225</sup> It has been objected, that if this psalm was composed at the time of the captivity of the Jews by Nebuchadnezzar, and the desolation of the Holy Land by the Chaldeans, *moadey*, cannot signify *synagogues*, because the Jews had no synagogues for public worship or public instruction till after the Babylonish captivity. Accordingly, Dr Prideaux thinks that the *Proseuchae* are meant. These were courts resembling those in which the people prayed at the tabernacle, and afterwards at the temple, built by those who lived at a distance from Jerusalem, and who were unable at all times to resort thither. They were erected as places in which the Jews might offer up their daily prayers. “They differed,” says Prideaux, “from synagogues in several particulars. For, first, In synagogues the prayers were offered up in public forms in common for the whole congregation; but in the *Proseuchae* they prayed as in the temple, every one apart for himself. Secondly, The synagogues were covered houses; but the *Proseuchae* were open courts, built in the manner of forums, which were open enclosures. Thirdly, Synagogues were all built within the cities to which they did belong; but the *Proseuchae* without.” — *Connection of the History*, etc., Part 1, Book 6, pages 139-141. Synagogues were afterwards used for the same purpose as the *Proseuchae*, and hence both come to be designated by the same name. The same author supposes that those places in the cities of the Levites, and the schools of the prophets, whither the people resorted for instruction, having been called, as well as the *Proseuchae*, *moadey-el*, are also here intended. “The word *moadey*,” says Dr Adam Clarke, “which we translate *synagogues*, may be taken in a more general sense, and mean any places where *religious assemblies* were held; and that such places and assemblies did exist long *before* the Babylonish captivity is pretty evident from different parts of Scripture.” See 2 Kings 4:23; Ezekiel 33:31; Acts 15:21. All such places were consumed to ashes by the hostile invaders whose ravages are bewailed, it having been their purpose to extinguish for ever the Jewish religion, and, as the most likely means of effecting their object, to destroy every memorial of it.

turned their rage against the material temple or synagogues. The prophet simply complains that they were so intent upon blotting out the name of God, that they left not a single corner on which there was not the mark of the hand of violence. The Hebrew word *moadim*, is commonly taken for *the sanctuary*; but when we consider its etymology, it is not inappropriately applied to those places where the holy assemblies were wont to be held, not only for reading and expounding the prophets, but also for calling upon the name of God. The wicked, as if the prophet had said, have done all in their power to extinguish and annihilate the worship of God in Judea.

### Psalm 74:9-12

**9.** We see not our signs: there is no longer a prophet, nor any with us that knoweth how long. **10.** How long, O God! shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever? **11.** How long wilt thou withdraw thy hand, and thy right hand? in the midst of thy bosom consume them.<sup>226</sup> **12.** But God is my King from the beginning, working deliverances in the midst of the earth.

**9.** *We see not our signs.* Here the pious Jews show that their calamities were aggravated from the circumstance that they had no consolation by which to alleviate them. It is a powerful means of encouraging the children of God, when he enables them to cherish the hope of his being reconciled to them, by promising, that even in the midst of his wrath he will remember his mercy. Some limit *the signs* here spoken of to the miracles by which God had in the days of old testified, at the very time when he was afflicting his people, that he would, notwithstanding, still continue to be gracious to them. But the faithful rather complain that he had removed from them the tokens of his favor, and had in a manner hidden his face from them.<sup>227</sup> We are overwhelmed with darkness, as if the prophet had said, because thou, O God! dost not make thy face to shine upon us as thou hast been accustomed to do. Thus it is common for us to speak of persons giving us signs either of their love or of their hatred. In short, God's people here complain not only that the time was cloudy and dark, but also that they were enveloped in darkness so thick, that there did not appear so much as a single ray of light. As to be assured by the prophets of future deliverance was one of the chief signs of God's favor, they lament that there is no longer a prophet to foresee the end of their calamities. From this we learn that the office of imparting consolation was committed to the prophets, that they might lift up the hearts which were cast down with sorrow, by inspiring them with the hope of Divine mercy. They were, it is true, heralds and witnesses of the wrath of God to drive the obstinate and rebellious to repentance by threatenings and terrors. But had they merely and without qualification denounced the vengeance of God, their doctrine, which was appointed and intended for the salvation of the people, would have only been the means of their destruction. Accordingly, the foretelling of the issue of calamities while yet hidden in the future, is ascribed to them as a part of their office; for temporary punishments are the fatherly chastisements of God, and the

<sup>226</sup> "We see not any token of thy Divine presence with us." — Tremellius.

<sup>227</sup> The verb, which is, *kalleh*, in Pihel conjugation, is from *kalah*, *consumptus est* In Psalm 59:13, it is twice used, *kalleh bechemah kalleh*, "consume *them* in wrath, consume *them*." *Consume*, therefore, appears to be a preferable translation to *pluck*, which is that of our English version.

consideration that they are temporary alleviates sorrow; but his continual displeasure causes poor and wretched sinners to sink into utter despair. If, therefore, we also would find matter for patience and consolation, when we are under the chastening hand of God, let us learn to fix our eyes on this moderation on the part of God, by which he encourages us to entertain good hope; and from it let us rest assured, that although he is angry, yet he ceases not to be a father. The correction which brings deliverance does not inflict unmitigated grief: the sadness which it produces is mingled with joy. This end all the prophets endeavored to keep in view in the doctrine which they delivered. They, no doubt, often make use of very hard and severe language in their dealings with the people, in order, by inspiring them with terror, to break and subdue their rebellion; but whenever they see men humbled, they immediately address them in words of consolation, which, however, would be no consolation at all, were they not encouraged to hope for future deliverance.

The question may here be asked, whether God, with the view of assuaging the sadness arising from the chastisement, which he inflicted, always determined the number of years and days during which they would last? To this I answer, that although the prophets have not always marked out and defined a fixed time, yet they frequently gave the people assurance that deliverance was near at hand; and, moreover, all of them spoke of the future restoration of the Church. If it is again objected, that the people in their affliction did wrong in not applying to themselves the general promises, which it is certain were the common property of all ages, I answer, that as it was God's usual way to send in every affliction a messenger to announce the tidings of deliverance, the people, when at the present time no prophet appeared to be expressly sent for that purpose, not without cause complain that they were deprived of the signs of the Divine favor which they had been accustomed to enjoy. Until the coming of Christ it was highly necessary that the memory of the promised deliverance should be renewed in every age, to show the people of God that to whatever afflictions they might be subjected, he still continued to care for them, and would afford them succor.

**10.** *How long, O God! shall the adversary reproach?* Here it is intimated that nothing inflicted upon them greater anguish than when they saw the name of God blasphemed by the ungodly. By this manner of praying, the object of the inspired writer was to kindle in our hearts a zeal for maintaining the Divine glory. We are naturally too delicate and tender for bearing calamities; but it is a decided proof of genuine godliness, when the contumely which is cast upon God grieves and disquiets our minds more than all our own personal sufferings. The poor Jews, there can be no doubt, were assailed with more kinds of reproach than one under a most cruel tyrant, and amongst a barbarous nation. But the prophet, speaking in the person of the whole Church, makes almost no account of the reproaches cast upon the people in comparison of the execrable blasphemies directed against God; according to the statement contained in Psalm 69:9, "The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me." The phrase *for ever* is again added; for when the ungodly continue long unpunished, this has a hardening effect, and renders them more audacious, especially when the revilings which they pour forth against God seem to pass unnoticed by him. It is, therefore, added immediately after in the 11th verse,

**11.** *How long wilt thou withdraw thy hand?* It is easy to see what the prophet here intends, and yet interpreters are not agreed as to the words. Some by the word *hand*, in the first part of the verse, understand *the left hand*, to distinguish it from *the right hand*, mentioned in the last clause of the verse. But this is mere trifling; for when he uses the term *right hand*, he simply repeats the same thing according to his usual manner. Some translate the verb , *kalah*, the last word of the verse,

by *hinder* or *restrain*, as if the prophet had said, Do thou at length stretch forth thy hand, which has been kept too long in thy bosom. But this is a forced sense, to which they have recourse without any color of reason. Those who translate it *consume* understand *the midst of God's bosom*, as denoting allegorically his temple,<sup>228</sup> an interpretation of which I cannot approve. It will be better to continue the interrogation to the last word in this way: "How long wilt thou withdraw thy hand? Yea, wilt thou withdraw it from the midst of thy bosom? Consume, therefore, these ungodly men who so proudly despise thee." We may also not improperly view the words as a prayer that as God's enemies persuaded themselves that he was slothful and idle, because he did not bestir himself, nor openly lift up his hand; he would cause them to feel that he was perfectly able to destroy them with his nod alone, although he should not move so much as a finger.

**12.** *But God is my King from the beginning.* In this verse, as we have often seen to be the case in other places, the people of God intermingle meditations with their prayers, thereby to acquire renewed vigor to their faith, and to stir up themselves to greater earnestness in the duty of prayer. We know how difficult it is to rise above all doubts, and boldly to persevere in a free and unrestrained course of prayer. Here, then, the faithful call to remembrance the proofs of God's mercy and working, by which he certified, through a continued series of ages, that he was the King and Protector of the people whom he had chosen. By this example we are taught, that as it is not enough to pray with the lips unless we also pray in faith, we ought always to remember the benefits by which God has given a confirmation of his fatherly love towards us, and should regard them as so many testimonies of his electing love. It is quite clear that the title *King*, which is here applied to *God*, ought not to be restricted merely to his sovereignty. He is addressed by this appellation because he had taken upon him the government of the Jewish people, in order to preserve and maintain them in safety. We have already stated what is implied in the words, *from the beginning*. By *the midst of the earth* some think that Judea is intended, because it was situated as it were in the midst of the habitable globe. There is no doubt that it is to be understood of a place which stands prominently in view. We find the expression used in this sense in these words which God commanded Moses to speak to Pharaoh,

"And I will sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which my people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there; to the end thou mayest know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth," (Exodus 8:22.)

The simple and natural meaning, therefore, is, that God had wrought in behalf of the chosen people many deliverances, which were as open and manifest as if they had been exhibited on a conspicuous theater.

## Psalm 74:13-17

<sup>228</sup> "The Jewish Arab reads, 'Turn not from them thy hand, even thy right hand, but consume them out of the midst of thy house,' giving a note, that the *house of God* is called . . ." — *Hammond*

**13.** Thou hast divided the sea by thy <sup>229</sup> power: thou hast broken the heads of the dragons <sup>230</sup> upon the waters. **14.** Thou hast broken the head <sup>231</sup> of Leviathan <sup>232</sup> in pieces, and hast given him for food to thy people in the wilderness. **15.** Thou hast cleaved [or divided] the fountain and the torrent: thou hast dried up mighty rivers. **16.** The day is thine, the night also is thine: thou hast ordained <sup>233</sup> the light <sup>234</sup> and the sun. **17.** Thou hast set [or fixed] all the boundaries of the earth: thou hast made the summer and the winter.

**13.** *Thou hast divided the sea by thy power.* The prophet now collects together certain kinds of deliverances highly worthy of remembrance; all of them, however, belonging to the first deliverance by which God emancipated his people from the tyranny of Egypt. We will find him afterwards descending to the general commendation of the goodness of God which is diffused through the whole world. Thus from the special grace which God vouchsafes to his Church, he passes on to speak of the good-will which he displays towards all mankind. In the first place, he says, *Thou hast divided, or cleaved, the sea.* Some think that the following clause is subjoined as an effect of what is stated in the first clause, — God, by drying up the sea, having caused the whales and other great fishes to die. I am, however, of opinion, that it is to be taken metaphorically for Pharaoh and his army; this mode of expression being very common among the prophets, especially when they speak of the Egyptians, whose country was washed by a sea abounding with fish, and divided by the Nile. Pharaoh is, therefore, not improperly termed *Leviathan*, <sup>235</sup> on account of the advantages of the sea

<sup>229</sup> There is here a change of person, and a transition from the narrative form of speech to the apostrophe, which give animation to the composition, and enhances its poetical beauty.

<sup>230</sup> The word *thanninim*, for *dragons*, is used by the sacred writers somewhat indeterminately, and translators render it variously, as by whales, serpents, dragons, crocodiles, and other sea-monsters. (See Genesis 1:21; Exodus 7:12; Deuteronomy 32:33; and Psalm 148:7.) We cannot now ascertain what particular animal is in each case denoted, and it may very probably be merely a general term equivalent to our word “monster,” for any strange and prodigious creature. *thanninim*, is here explained by Williams as denoting “sea-monsters or large serpents.” “What animal is meant by this name,” says Mant, “is not well ascertained. But it seems to have been some aquatic or amphibious creature commonly known in the neighborhood of Egypt, but not the crocodile, as that is noticed under a different name in the following verse.” By *the dragons* the Egyptian people may be intended.

<sup>231</sup> In the Hebrew it is “the heads.”

<sup>232</sup> “C’est, le plus grand monstre marin qui soit.” — *Fr. marg.* “That is, the greatest sea-monster which exists.”

<sup>233</sup> “Ou, établi.” — *Fr. marg.* “Or, established.”

<sup>234</sup> *maor*, here rendered *the light*, from *or*, *to shine*, signifies in general any luminary or receptacle of light; the sun or the moon indiscriminately. See Genesis 1:16. But being here joined with and opposed to the sun, as the night is to the day in the preceding clause, it has been supposed to signify the moon, the luminary of the night, as the sun is that of the day. The Chaldee, the LXX., the Syriac, and Arabic, render it *the moon*. The Vulgate has “auroram,” “the morning.”

<sup>235</sup> Calvin supposes that the whale is the animal here referred to, and this was the opinion for a long time universally held. But from a comparison of the description given by Job of the Leviathan (Job 41) with what is known of the natural history of the crocodile, there can be little doubt that the crocodile is the Leviathan of Scripture. This is now very generally agreed upon. “Almost all the oldest commentators,” says Dr Good, “I may say unconditionally *all* of them concurred in regarding the whale as the animal” intended by the Leviathan. “Beza and Diodati were among the first to interpret it ‘the crocodile.’ And Bochart has since supported this last rendering with a train of argument, which has nearly overwhelmed all opposition, and has brought almost every commentator over to his opinion.” — *Dr Good’s New Translation of Job* “With respect to the Leviathan,” says Fry, “all are now pretty well agreed that it can apply only to the crocodile, and probably it was nothing but a defective knowledge of the language of the book of Job, or of the natural history of this stupendous animal, which led former commentators to imagine the description applicable to any other.” — *Fry’s New Translation and Exposition of the Book of Job* This Egyptian animal, the crocodile of the Nile, as we have formerly observed, (p. 38, note,) was anciently employed as a symbol of the Egyptian power, or of their king. Parkhurst remarks that in Scheuchzer’s *Physica Sacra* may be seen a medal with Julius Caesar’s head on one side, and on the reverse a crocodile with this inscription, — *Ægypte Capta, Egypt Taken*. This strengthens the conclusion that the crocodile is the animal intended by the name Leviathan. Both the etymology of the name Leviathan, and to what language

possessed by his country, and because, in reigning over that land with great splendor, he might be compared to a whale moving up and down at its ease in the midst of the waters of the mighty ocean.<sup>236</sup> As God put forth his power at that time for the deliverance of the people, to assure the Church that he would always be her protector and the guardian of her welfare, the encouragement afforded by this example ought not to be limited exclusively to one age. It is, therefore, with good reason applied to the descendants of that ancient race, that they might improve it as a means of confirming and establishing their faith. The prophet does not here recount all the miracles which God had wrought at the departure of the people from the land of Egypt; but in adverting to some of them, he comprehends by the figure synecdoche, all that Moses has narrated concerning them at greater length. When he says that leviathan was given *for food* to the Israelites, and that even in the wilderness,<sup>237</sup> there is a beautiful allusion to the destruction of Pharaoh and his host. It is as if he had said, that then a bountiful provision of victuals was laid up for the nourishment of the people; for when their enemies were destroyed, the quiet and security which the people in consequence enjoyed served, so to speak, as food to prolong their life. By *the wilderness*, is not meant the countries lying on the sea coast, though they are dry and barren, but the deserts at a great distance from the sea. The same subject is prosecuted in the following verse, where it is declared, that *the fountain was cleaved or divided*, that is, it was so when God caused a stream of water to gush from the rock to supply the wants of the people.<sup>238</sup> Finally, it is added, that *mighty rivers*<sup>239</sup> *were dried up*, an event which happened when God caused the waters of the Jordan to turn back to make a way for his people to pass over. Some would have the Hebrew word *ethan*, which signifies

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it belongs, according to Simonis, are unknown. But according to Gesenius it signifies “properly the twisted animal.” It is affirmed by the Arabic lexicographers quoted by Bochart, (*Phaleg* Lib. 1, cap. 15,) that Pharaoh in the Egyptian language signified a crocodile; and if so, there may be some such allusion to his name in this passage, and in Ezekiel 29:3, and 32:2, where the king of Egypt is represented by the same animal, as was made to the name of Draco, when Herodicus (in a sarcasm recorded by Aristotle, *Rhet* Lib. 2, cap. 23) said that his laws, — which were very severe, — were the laws οὐκ ἀνθρώπου ἀλλὰ δράκοντος, non hominis sed draconis. — *Merrick’s Annotations* “*The heads of Leviathan*” may denote the princes of Egypt, or the leaders of the Egyptian armies.

<sup>236</sup> “Regnoit en grand triomphe, comme la balene se pourmene a sou aise au milieu de ce grande amas d’eaux.” — *Fr.*

<sup>237</sup> Calvin reads, “thy people in the wilderness.” But *thy* has nothing to represent it in the original, which literally is, “to a people, to those of the wilderness.” Those who adopt this rendering are not agreed as to what is to be understood by the expression. Some think it means the birds and beasts of prey, who devoured the dead bodies of Pharaoh and the Egyptian army, when cast upon the coast of the Red Sea by the tides. See Exodus 14:30. If such is the meaning, these birds and beasts of prey are called “the people of wilderness,” as being its principal inhabitants. That *am*, *people*, is sometimes to be thus interpreted in Scripture is evident from Proverbs 30:25, 26, where both the *ants* and the *conies* are styled *a people*. But as the desert on the coast of which the Egyptians were thrown up was inhabited by tribes of people who lived on fishes — even on those of the largest kind, which they found cast upon the shore by the tides — and were from thence called Ιχθυοφάγοι, or *fish-eaters*; some interpreters suppose that these are “the people of the wilderness” here mentioned; and that as Pharaoh and his host are represented under the figure of the Leviathan and other monsters of the deep, so these people, in allusion to their common way of living, are figuratively said to have preyed on their dead bodies, by which is understood their enriching themselves with their spoils.

<sup>238</sup> “Quand Dieu fait que de la roche saillit un cours d’eau pour la necessite du peuple.” — *Fr.*

<sup>239</sup> It is *rivers* in the plural, from which it would appear that the Jordan was not the only river which was dried up, to give an easy passage to the Israelites. The Chaldee specifies the Arnon, the Jabbok, and the Jordan, as the rivers here referred to. With respect to the Jordan, see Joshua 3:16. As to the miraculous drying up either of the Arnon or the Jabbok, we have no distinct account in Scripture. But in Numbers 21, after it is mentioned, verse 13, that the Israelites “pitched on the other side of Arnon,” it follows, verses 14, 15, “Wherefore, it is said in the book of the wars of the Lord, What he did in the Red Sea, and in the brooks of Arnon, and at the stream of the brooks that goeth down to the dwelling of Ar, and lieth upon the border of Moab.” From this it would appear that God wrought at “the brooks of Arnon, and at the stream of the brooks that goeth down to the dwelling of Ar,” miracles similar to that which was wrought at the Red Sea, when it was divided to open up a passage for the chosen tribes.



*mighty*, to be a proper name, as if the correct translation were *rivers of Ethan*; but this interpretation is altogether without foundation.

**16.** *The day is thine, the night also is thine.* The prophet now descends to the consideration of the divine benefits which are extended in common to all mankind. Having commenced with the special blessings by which God manifested himself to be the Father of his chosen people, he now aptly declares that God exercises his beneficence towards the whole human family. He teaches us, that it is not by chance that the days and nights succeed each other in regular succession, but that this order was established by the appointment of God. The secondary cause of these phenomena is added, being that arrangement by which God has invested the sun with the power and office of illuminating the earth; for after having spoken of *the light* he adds *the sun*, as the principal means of communicating it, and, so to speak, the chariot in which it is brought when it comes to show itself to men.<sup>240</sup> As then the incomparable goodness of God towards the human race clearly shines forth in this beautiful arrangement, the prophet justly derives from it an argument for strengthening and establishing his trust in God.

**17.** *Thou hast fixed*<sup>241</sup> *all the boundaries of the earth.* What is here stated concerning the boundaries or limits assigned to the earth, and concerning the regular and successive recurrence of summer and winter every year, is to the same effect as the preceding verse. It is doubtful whether the prophet means the uttermost ends of the world, or whether he speaks of the particular boundaries by which countries are separate from each other. Although the latter are often disturbed by the violence of men, whose insatiable cupidity and ambition cannot be restrained by any of the lines of demarcation which exist in the world, but are always endeavoring to break through them;<sup>242</sup> yet God manifests his singular goodness in assigning to each nation its own territory upon which to dwell. I am, however, rather of opinion, that the clause is to be understood of those bounds which cannot be confounded at the will of men, and consider the meaning to be, that God has allotted to men as much space of earth as he has seen to be sufficient for them to dwell upon. Farther, the well regulated successions of summer and winter clearly indicate with what care and benignity God has provided for the necessities of the human family. From this, the prophet justly concludes, that nothing is more improbable than that God should neglect to act the part of a father towards his own flock and household.

### Psalm 74:18-23

**18.** Remember this: the adversary hath blasphemed Jehovah: and a worthless people hath done despite to thy name. **19.** Give not to the beast the soul of thy turtle dove: forget not the congregation of thy poor ones for ever. **20.** Have regard to thy covenant: for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of violence. **21.** Let not him who is oppressed [or afflicted] return ashamed: let the poor and needy one praise thy name. **22.** Arise, O God! Plead thy cause: remember thy reproach,

<sup>240</sup> “Comme le principal instrument d’icelle, et par maniere de dire, le chariot auquel elle est apportee, quand elle se vient monstrier aux hommes.” — *Fr.*

<sup>241</sup> The original word implies “to settle, to place steadily in a certain situation or place.” See *Parkhurst’s Lexicon on*

<sup>242</sup> “Entant que leur cupidite et ambition insatiable ne pent estre retenue par quelque separation qu’il y ait, mais tasche tousjours d’enjamber par dessus.” — *Fr.*

which is done to thee by the foolish man daily. **23.** Forget not the voice of thy adversaries: the tumult of those who rise up against thee ascendeth continually.

**18. Remember this.** The prophet having encouraged the hearts of the godly by magnifying the divine power and goodness, now returns to the prosecution of his prayer. He first complains that the enemies of his people revile God, and yet continue unpunished. When he says, *Remember this*, the manner of expression is emphatic; and the occasion demanded it, for it is not a crime of small magnitude to treat with contumely the sacred name of God. For the sake of contrast, he states that it was a *worthless or foolish people* who thus presumed insolently to pour forth their reproaches against God. The Hebrew word , *nabal*, denotes not only a *foolish man*, but also a *wicked and infamous person*. The prophet, therefore, justly describes the despisers of God as people who are vile and worthless.

**19. Give not to the beast the soul of thy turtle dove.** The Hebrew word , *chayath*, which we translate *beast*, signifies sometimes *the soul or life*, and so some explain it in the second clause of this verse, where it again occurs. But it is here unquestionably to be taken either for a *wild beast* or for a *multitude*. Understood in either of these ways, this form of expression will contain a very apposite comparison between the life of a weak and timorous bird, and a powerful army of men, or a cruel beast. The Church is compared to a *turtle dove*<sup>243</sup> for, although the faithful consisted of a considerable number, yet so far were they from matching their enemies, that, on the contrary, they were exposed to them as a prey. It is next added, *Forget not the soul or congregation of thy poor ones*. The Hebrew word , *chayath*, is again employed, and there is an elegance when, on account of its ambiguity, it is used twice in the same verse, but in different senses. I have preferred translating it *congregation*, rather than *soul*, because the passage seems to be a prayer that it would please God to watch over and defend his own small flock from the mighty hosts of their enemies.

**20. Have regard to thy covenant.** That God may be the more inclined to show mercy, the prophet brings to his remembrance the Divine covenant; even as the refuge of the saints, when they have found themselves involved in extreme dangers, has always been to hope for deliverance, because God had promised, in the covenant which he made with them, to be a father to them, From this we

<sup>243</sup> As none of the ancient versions have “turtle dove,” and as the reading of the LXX. is, ἐξομολογουμένην σοι, *confessing thee*, it has been thought by some in a high degree probable that the word , *torecha*, *thy turtle dove* in our present Hebrew copies, should be , *todecha*, *confessing thee*; an error which transcribers might easily have committed, by writing , *resh*, instead of , *daleth*. Houbigant, who approves of this opinion, boldly pronounces the other, which represents the people of God under the figure of a *turtle dove*, to be “putidum et aliunde conquisitum.” But, says Archbishop Secker, “*Turtle dove*, which Houbigant calls *putidum*, should not be called so, considering that, , Cant. 2, 14, is the same thing.” The passage, as it now stands, agrees with other texts of Scripture which represent the people of God under the image of a bird, Numbers 24:21; Jeremiah 22:23; 48:28. The turtle dove is a defenceless, solitary, timid, and mournful creature, equally destitute of skill and courage to defend itself from the rapacious birds of prey which thirst for its blood. And this gives a very apt and affecting representation of the state of the Church when this psalm was written. She was in a weak, helpless, and sorrowful condition, in danger of being speedily devoured by the inveterate and implacable enemies, who, like birds of prey, were besetting her on all sides, eagerly intent upon her destruction. “With the most plaintive earnestness she pleads her cause with the Almighty, through this and the following verses; continually growing more importunate in her petitions as the danger increases. While speaking, she seems in the last verse to hear the tumultuous clamours of the approaching enemy growing every minute louder as they advance; and we leave the ‘turtle dove’ without the Divine assistance, ready to sink under the talons of the rapacious eagle.” — *Mant*

“The Psalmist’s expression, *thy turtle dove*, may perhaps be farther illustrated from the custom, ancient and modern, of keeping doves as favourite birds, (see Theocritus, 5. 96; and Virgil, *Ecl. 3, 5, 68, 69,*) and from the care taken to secure them from such animals as are dangerous to them.” — *Merrick’s Annotations*.

learn, that the only firm support on which our prayers can rest is, that God has adopted us to be his people by his free choice. Whence, also, it appears how devilish was the phrensy of that filthy dog Servetus, who was not ashamed to affirm that it is foolish, and gross mockery, to lay before God his own promises when we are engaged in prayer. Farther, the godly Jews again show us how severely they were afflicted, when they declare that violence and oppression were everywhere prevalent; as if all places were the haunts of cut-throats and the dens of robbers.<sup>244</sup> It is said *the dark places of the earth*; for, whenever God seems to hide his face, the wicked imagine that whatever wickedness they may commit, they will find, wherever they may be, hiding-places by which to cover it all.

**21.** *Let not him who is oppressed return with shame.* The word *return*, as it has a reference to God, is equivalent to the expression, *to go away empty*. The faithful, then, beseech Him that they may not be put to shame by suffering a repulse at his hands. They call themselves *afflicted*, *poor*, and *needy*, as an argument to obtain the Divine favor and mercy. It is, however, to be observed, that they do not speak insincerely, nor give an exaggerated representation of their distresses, but intimate, that by so many calamities they were brought to such a low condition, that there no longer remained for them any quarter in the world from which they could expect any help. By this example, we are taught that when we are reduced to the greatest extremity, there is a remedy always ready for our misery, in calling upon God.

**22.** *Arise, O God! plead thy cause.* The pious Jews again supplicate God to ascend into his judgment-seat. He is then said *to arise*, when, after having long exercised forbearance, he shows, in very deed, that he has not forgotten his office as judge. To induce him to undertake this cause the more readily, they call upon him to maintain his own right. Lord, as if they had said, since the matter in hand is what peculiarly concerns thyself; it is not time for thee to remain inactive. They declare, at the same time, how this was, in a special sense, the cause of God. It was so, because the foolish people daily cast reproaches upon him. We may here again translate the word *nabal*, *the worthless people*, instead of *the foolish people*. The wickedness charged against the persons spoken of is aggravated from the circumstance, that, not content with reproaching God on one occasion, they continued their derision and mockery without intermission. For this reason, the faithful conclude by invoking God that he would not forget such heaven-daring conduct in men who not only had the audacity to reproach his majesty, but who fiercely and outrageously poured forth their blasphemies against him. They seemed, it is true, to do this indirectly; but, as they despised God, it is asserted that they *rose up against him* with reckless and infatuated presumption, after the manner of the Giants of old, and that their haughtiness was carried to the greatest excess.

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<sup>244</sup> “The caves, dens, woods, etc., of the *land*, are full of robbers, cut-throats, and murderers, who are continually destroying thy people; so that the holy seed seems as if it would be entirely cut off, and the *covenant* promise thus rendered void.” — *Dr Adam Clarke*. “*For the dark places of the earth, i.e., the caverns of Judea, are full of the habitations of violence, i.e., of men who live by rapine. Some, however, by the dark places of the earth, understand the seat of the captivity of the Jews.*” — *Cresswell*.

# PSALM 75

It affords matter of rejoicing and thanksgiving to the whole Church, to reflect that the world is governed exclusively according to the will of God, and that she herself is sustained by his grace and power alone. Encouraged by this consideration, she triumphs over the proud despisers of God, who, by their infatuated presumption, are driven headlong into all manner of excess.

*To the chief musician. Destroy not. A Psalm of Asaph. A Song.*

## Psalm 75:1-7

**1.** We will praise thee, O God! we will praise thee: and <sup>245</sup> thy name is near: they will declare [or recount <sup>246</sup> ] thy wondrous works. **2.** When I shall have taken the congregation, <sup>247</sup> I will judge righteously. <sup>248</sup> **3.** The earth is dissolved, and all its inhabitants: I will establish <sup>249</sup> the pillars of it. **4.** I said to the fools, Act not foolishly: and to the ungodly, Lift not up the horn. **5.** Lift not up your horn on high; and speak not with a stiff neck. **6.** For exaltations come neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the wilderness. <sup>250</sup> **7.** For God is judge: <sup>251</sup> he bringeth low, and he setteth up.

**1.** *We will praise thee, O God!* With respect to the inscription of this psalm, I have sufficiently spoken when explaining the 57th psalm. As to the author of it, this is a point, in the determination of which, I am not inclined to give myself much trouble. Whoever he was, whether David or some other prophet, he breaks forth at the very commencement into the language of joy and thanksgiving: *We will praise thee, O God! we will praise thee.* The repetition serves the more forcibly to express his strong affection and his ardent zeal in singing the praises of God. The verbs in the Hebrew are in the past tense; but the subject of the psalm requires that they should be translated into the future; which may be done in perfect consistency with the idiom of the Hebrew language. The inspired writer, however, may declare that God had been praised among his people for the benefits which he had bestowed in the times of old, the design being thereby to induce God to persevere in acting in the same manner, that thus continuing like himself, he might from time to time afford his people new matter for celebrating his praises. The change of the person in the concluding part of the verse has led some interpreters to supply the relative pronoun , *asher, who*, as if the reading were, *O Lord! we will praise thee; and thy name is near to those who declare thy wondrous works* <sup>252</sup> But the prophet, I have no doubt, puts the verb *they will declare*, indefinitely, that is to say, without determining the person; <sup>253</sup> and he has used the copula *and* instead of the causal participle *for*, as

<sup>245</sup> “C’est, car.” — *Fr. marg.* “That is, for.”

<sup>246</sup> “Par ainsi on racontera.” — *Fr.* “Therefore they will recount.”

<sup>247</sup> “Quand j’auray prins assignation.” — *Fr.* “When I shall have received the appointment.” “Ou, assemble la congregation.” — *Fr. marg.* “Or, assembled the congregation.”

<sup>248</sup> “C’est, je remettray les choses en leur estat.” — *Fr. marg.* “That is, I will restore things to order.”

<sup>249</sup> “Mais j’affermeray.” — *Fr.* “But I will support or sustain.”

<sup>250</sup> “C’est, du Midi.” — *Fr. marg.* “That is, from the South.”

<sup>251</sup> “C’est, gouverne le monde.” — *Fr. marg.* “That is, governs the world.”

<sup>252</sup> This is the reading adopted by Hammond; but instead of making it out by supplying the pronoun , *asher*, as is done by some, he renders, , *sipperu*, as a participle plural in the sense of the dative case. “Thy name is near, , *sipperu*, to them that declare thy wondrous works.” He supports this view from the Chaldee, and from the translation of the learned Castello.

<sup>253</sup> “C’est a dire, sans determiner personne.” — *Fr.*

is frequently done. His meaning, then, may be brought out very appropriately th We will praise thee, O God! for thy name is near; and, therefore, thy wondrous works shall be declared. He, no doubt, means that the same persons whom he said would celebrate the praise of God, would be the publishers of his wonderful works. And, certainly, God, in displaying his power, opens the mouths of his servants to recount his works. In short, the design is to intimate that there is just ground for praising God, who shows himself to be at hand to afford succor to his people. The *name* of God, as is well known, is taken for *his power*; and *his presence*, or *nearness*, is judged of by the assistance which he grants to his people in the time of their need.

2. *When I shall have taken the congregation.* The Hebrew verb , *yaäd*, signifies *to appoint a place* or *day*, and the noun , *moed*, derived from it, which is here used, signifies both *holy assemblies*, or *a congregation of the faithful assembled together in the name of the Lord*, and *festival*, or *appointed solemn days*. As it is certain that God is here introduced as speaking, either of these senses will agree with the scope of the passage. It may be viewed as denoting either that having gathered his people to himself, he will restore to due order matters which were in a state of distraction and confusion, or else that he will make choice of a fit time for exercising his judgment. In abandoning his people for a season to the will of their enemies, he seems to forsake them and to exercise no care about them; so that they are like a flock of sheep which is scattered, and wanders hither and thither without a shepherd. It being his object, then, to convey in these words a promise that he would remedy such a confused state of things, he very properly commences with the gathering together of his Church. If any choose rather to understand the word , *moed*, as referring to *time*<sup>254</sup> God is to be understood as admonishing his people, that it is their bounden duty to exercise patience until he actually show that the proper time is come for correcting vices, since he only has the years and days in his own power, and knows best the fit juncture and moment for performing this work. The interpretation to which I most incline is, That, to determine the end and measure of calamities, and the best season of rising up for the deliverance of his people, — matters, the determination of which men would willingly claim for themselves, — is reserved by God in his own hands, and is entirely subject to his own will. At the same time, I am very well satisfied with the former interpretation, which refers the passage to the gathering together of the Church. Nor ought it to seem absurd or harsh that God is here introduced as returning an answer to the prayers of his people. This graphic representation, by which they are made to speak in the first verse, while he is introduced as speaking in the second, is much more forcible than if the prophet had simply said, that God would at length, and at the determined time, show himself to be the protector of his Church, and gather her together again when she should be scattered and rent in pieces. The amount, in short, is, that although God may not succor his own people immediately, yet he never forgets them, but only delays until the fit time arrive, the redress which he has in readiness for them. *To judge righteously*, is just to restore to a better state matters which are embroiled and disordered. Thus Paul says,

“Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels.” (2 Thessalonians 1:6, 7)

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<sup>254</sup> The reading adopted by the most eminent critics is, “When I shall have gotten an appointed or fit time or season, I will judge uprightly.” This is supported by all the ancient versions.

God, therefore, declares that it is his office to set in order and adjust those things which are in confusion, that, entertaining this expectation, we may be sustained and comforted by means of it in all our afflictions.

**3.** *The earth is dissolved, and all its inhabitants.* Many commentators are of opinion that these words are properly applicable to Christ, at whose coming it behoved the earth and its inhabitants to be shaken. He reigns, as we know, that he may destroy the old man, and he commences his spiritual kingdom with the destruction of the flesh; but he conducts his administration in such a manner as that afterwards there follows the restoration of the new man. Of the second part of the verse, *I will establish the pillars of it*, they make the same application, explaining it as if Christ had said, As soon as I come into the world, the earth with its inhabitants shall melt and be dissolved; but immediately after I will establish it upon firm and solid foundations; for my elect ones, renewed by my Spirit, shall no longer be like grass or withered flowers, but shall have conferred upon them new and unwonted stability. I do not, however, think that such a refined interpretation ever entered into the mind of the prophet, whose words I consider as simply meaning, that although the earth may be dissolved, God has the props or supports of it in his own hand. This verse is connected with the preceding; for it confirms the truth that God in due time will manifest himself to be an impartial and righteous judge; it being an easy matter for him, although the whole fabric of the world were fallen into ruins, to rebuild it from its decayed materials. At the same time, I have no doubt that there is a reference to the actual state of things in the natural world. The earth occupies the lowest place in the celestial sphere, and yet instead of having foundations on which it is supported, is it not rather suspended in the midst of the air? Besides, since so many waters penetrate and pass through its veins, would it not be dissolved were it not established by the secret power of God? While, however, the prophet alludes to the natural state of the earth, he, nevertheless, rises higher, teaching us, that were the world even in ruins, it is in the power of God to re-establish it.

**4.** *I said to the fools, Act not foolishly.*<sup>255</sup> After he has set the office of God full in his own view and in the view of the faithful, he now triumphs over all the ungodly, whom he impeaches of madness and blind rage, the effect of their despising God, which leads them to indulge to excess in pride and self-gloriation. This holy boasting to which he gives utterance depends upon the judgment, which in the name of God he denounced to be at hand; for when the people of God expect that he is coming to execute judgment, and are persuaded that he will not long delay his coming, they glory even in the midst of their oppressions. The madness of the wicked may boil over and swell with rage, and pour forth floods to overwhelm them; but it is enough for them to know that their life is protected by the power of God, who can with the most perfect ease humble all pride, and restrain the most daring and presumptuous attempts. The faithful here deride and despise whatever the wicked plot and conspire to execute, and bid them desist from their madness; and in calling upon them to do this, they intimate that they are making all this stir and commotion in vain, resembling madmen, who are drawn hither and thither by their own distempered imaginations. It is to be observed, that the Psalmist represents pride as the cause or mother of all rash and audacious enterprises. The reason why men rush with such recklessness upon unlawful projects most certainly is, that blinded by pride, they form an undue and exaggerated estimate of their own power. This being a malady which is not easily eradicated from the hearts of men, the admonition, *Lift not up*

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<sup>255</sup> “Or, Be not mad.” The verb is , *tahollu*, from , *halal*, *he was mad, boasting* — *Bythner*

*your horn on high* <sup>256</sup> is repeated once and again. They are next enjoined *not to speak with a fat or a stiff neck*; by which is meant that they should not speak harshly and injuriously; <sup>257</sup> for it is usual with proud persons to erect the neck and raise the head when they pour forth their menaces. Others translate the words, *Speak not stiffly with your neck*; but the other translation is the more correct.

6. *For exaltations come neither from the east nor from the west.* <sup>258</sup> The prophet here furnishes an admirable remedy for correcting pride, when he teaches us that promotion or advancement proceeds not from the earth but from God alone. That which most frequently blinds the eyes of men is, their gazing about on the right hand and on the left, and their gathering together from all quarters riches and other resources, that, strengthened with these, they may be able to gratify their desires and lusts. The prophet, therefore, affirms, that in not rising above the world, they are laboring under a great mistake, since it is God alone who has the power to exalt and to abase. "This," it may be said, "seems to be at variance with common experience, it being the fact, that the majority of men who attain to the highest degrees of honor, owe their elevation either to their own policy and underhand dealing, or to popular favor and partiality, or to other means of an earthly kind. What is brought forward as the reason of this assertion, *God is judge*, seems also to be unsatisfactory." I answer, that although many attain to exalted stations either by unlawful arts, or by the aid of worldly instrumentality, yet that does not happen by chance; such persons being advanced to their elevated position by the secret purpose of God, that forthwith he may scatter them like refuse or chaff. The prophet does not simply attribute *judgment* to God. He also defines what kind of judgment it is, affirming it to consist in this, that, casting down one man and elevating another to dignity, he orders the affairs of the human race as seemeth good in his sight. I have stated that the consideration of this is the means by which haughty spirits are most effectually humbled; for the reason why worldly men have the daring to attempt whatever comes into their minds is, because they conceive of God as shut up in heaven, and think not that they are kept under restraint by his secret providence. In short, they would divest him of all sovereign power, that they might find a free and an unimpeded course for the gratification of their lusts. To teach us then, with all moderation and humility, to remain contented with our own condition, the Psalmist clearly defines in what the judgment of God, or the order which he observes in the government of the world, consists, telling us that it belongs to him alone to exalt or to abase those of mankind whom he pleases.

From this it follows that all those who, spreading the wings of their vanity, aspire after any kind of exaltation, without any regard to or dependence upon God, are chargeable with robbing him as much as in them lies of his prerogative and power. This is very apparent, not only from their frantic counsels, but also from the blasphemous boastings in which they indulge, saying, Who shall hinder

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<sup>256</sup> *Lift not up your horn on high*, that is, bear not yourselves insolently, from a false notion of your power, (comp. Amos 6:13.) It has been supposed that the metaphor is taken from the manner in which horned animals carry themselves when they are in an excited state. A practice among the Abyssinians, described by Mr Bruce, has been also adduced as throwing light upon this verse. He observes, that the governors of the provinces in Abyssinia wear a broad fillet round their heads, which is tied behind the head. In the middle of this fillet is a horn, or a conical piece of silver, gilded with gold; and shaped like our candle-extinguishers. This is called *kirn* or *horn*; and is only used in reviews or processions after victory. The way in which they throw back the head when wearing this ornament (lest it should fall forward) gives a *stiffness* to the position of the head; and this seems to explain the language of the Psalmist, when he mentions *speaking with a stiff neck*. Instead of *with a stiff neck*, Parkhurst translates *with a retorted neck*; observing, that "this is a well-known gesture of pride, contempt, or disdain."

<sup>257</sup> "*Praefracte*." — *Lat.* "Rigoureusement et outrageusement." — *Fr.*

<sup>258</sup> "*For promotion*, etc. The meaning is, the fortunes of men are not governed by planetary influences, but by God's overruling Providence. The Eastern nations of the world always were, and are at this day, much addicted to judicial astrology." — *Warner.*

me? What shall withstand me? as if, forsooth! it were not an easy matter for God, with his nod alone, suddenly to cast a thousand obstacles in their way, with which to render ineffectual all their efforts. As worldly men by their fool-hardihood and perverse devices are chargeable with endeavoring to despoil God of his royal dignity, so whenever we are dismayed at their threatenings, we are guilty of wickedly setting limits to the sovereignty and power of God. If, whenever we hear the wind blowing with any degree of violence,<sup>259</sup> we are as much frightened as if we were stricken with a thunderbolt from heaven, such extreme readiness to be thrown into a state of consternation manifestly shows that we do not as yet thoroughly understand the nature of that government which God exercises over the world. We would, no doubt, be ashamed to rob him of the title of judge; yea, there is almost no individual who would not shrink with horror at the thought of so great a blasphemy; and yet, when our natural understanding has extorted from us the confession that he is the judge and the supreme ruler of the world, we conceive of him as holding only a kind of inactive sovereignty, which I know not how to characterise, as if he did not govern mankind by his power and wisdom. But the man who believes it to be an established principle that God disposes of all men as seemeth good in his sight, and shapes to every man his condition in this world, will not stop at earthly means: he will look above and beyond these to God. The improvement which should be made of this doctrine is, that the godly should submit themselves wholly to God, and beware of being lifted up with vain confidence. When they see the impious waxing proud, let them not hesitate to despise their foolish and infatuated presumption. Again, although God has in his own hand sovereign power and authority, so that he can do whatever he pleases, yet he, is styled *judge*, to teach us that he governs the affairs of mankind with the most perfect equity. Whence it follows, that every man who abstains from inflicting injuries and committing deeds of mischief, may, when he is injured and treated unjustly, betake himself to the judgment-seat of God.

### Psalm 75:8-10

**8.** For in the hand of Jehovah there is a cup, and the wine is turbid, [or full of dregs:<sup>260</sup> ] it is full of mixture, and he shall pour forth of it: surely they shall wring out the dregs of it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drink of it. **9.** But I will publish for ever, and will sing praise to the God of Jacob. **10.** And I will break all the horns of the wicked: but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted.

**8.** *For in the hand of Jehovah there is a cup.*<sup>261</sup> The Psalmist here applies more directly to the use of the godly that judgment of which he has just now spoken. He affirms, that the object for which God reigns is, that no iniquity may remain unpunished; but that when wicked men have broken through all restraint and abandoned themselves to wickedness, he may drag them to deserved

<sup>259</sup> “Si tost que nous oyons le vent de quelque esmotion.” — *Fr.*

<sup>260</sup> “Ou, rouge.” — *Fr. marg.* “Or, red.”

<sup>261</sup> “Here there seems to be an allusion to the *cup of malediction*, as the Jews called that ‘mixed cup of wine’ and frankincense, which used to be given to condemned criminals before their execution, in order to take away their senses. So the Chaldee Targum paraphrases the passage; ‘Because a *cup of malediction* is in the hand of the Lord, and strong wine full of a mixture of bitterness, to take away the understanding of the wicked.’” — *Parkhurst* quoted by *Mant.*



punishment. From this we again learn what estimate we ought to form of the providence of God — that we ought to regard it as exercising its control by an ever-present energy over every part of our life. It is therefore asserted that God has in his hand a cup with which to make the wicked drunk. The word *chamar*, signifies *full of dregs*, and also *red*. As red wine among the Jews was the strongest and sharpest, we may suppose that it is here referred to; and the similitude is very appropriate, which represents God as having in his hand wine of a highly intoxicating character, with which to make the ungodly drunk even to death. It is implied, that the swiftness of divine vengeance is incredible, resembling the rapidity and power with which strong wine penetrates to the brain, and either produces madness or kindles a fever. It is on this account said, that the wine in God's cup is of a red color; as it is said in Proverbs 23:31,

“Look not upon the wine when it is red in the cup.”

Nor is it any objection to this that it is described a little after as *full of mixture*. These two things do not ill agree with each other; first, that the wicked are suddenly made drunk with the vengeance of God; and, secondly, that they drink it out even to the dregs, until they perish. Some give a different explanation of the term *mixture*, considering, but without any just ground, the allusion to be to the custom which prevails in warm climates of diluting wine with water. This expression, *it is full of mixture*, was rather added to give additional force to the statement of the prophet; his object being to compare the vehemence and fury of God's wrath to spiced wine.<sup>262</sup> By these figures he intimates that it will be impossible for the ungodly to escape drinking the cup which God will put into their hands, and that they will be compelled to drain it to the last drop.

**9. and 10.** *But I will publish for ever.* This conclusion of the psalm evinces the joy which God's people felt from having experienced that He was their deliverer in adversity; for it seems to be their own experience which they engage to publish, and on account of which they resolve to sing praise to God. Whence also they gather, that by the divine aid they will overcome all the power of the reprobate; and that being themselves possessed of righteousness and equity, they will be sufficiently armed for their own preservation and defense. The expression, *the horns of the righteous shall be exalted*,<sup>263</sup> implies, that the children of God, by a blameless and holy life, acquire greater strength,

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<sup>262</sup> *Mixed wine*, naturally suggests to us the idea of wine weaker than in its pure state. Accordingly, Green, instead of “full of mixture,” translates “unmixed,” by which he means wine unmixed with water. He perceived, what is evident at first sight, that wine of the strongest quality is intended, and having apparently no idea of any other mixture than that of water, which would weaken the wine, he took the liberty of rendering the words, *male mesech*, by “unmixed.” The Greeks and Latins, in like manner by “mixed wine,” understood wine diluted and weakened with water. But the phrase among the Hebrews generally denotes wine made stronger, by the addition of higher and more powerful ingredients. In the East, wines are much mixed with drugs of a stimulating and intoxicating kind; so that commonly when drawn from the vessels in which they are preserved, they are strained for use. What remains is the thick sediment of the strong and stimulating ingredients with which they had been mixed. This the wicked are doomed to drink. “The introduction of this circumstance,” says Mant, “forms a fine climax, and carries the idea of God's indignation to the highest point.” Some interpreters have explained the passage as meaning that God would pour out the pure and clear wine for his friends, while he would compel his enemies to drink the dregs. But the reference is entirely to his enemies, who were wholly to exhaust this cup of his fury. This, with the prophets, is a very common image of divine wrath. See volume 2, page 399, note.

<sup>263</sup> “By the *horns* of the wicked is signified *pride*; by the horns of the righteous, on the other hand, is meant their power. Basil has remarked, that the horn is more exalted and more solid than any other part of the body to which it belongs; and that, at the same time, it supplies ornament to the head, and is also a weapon of defense. Hence it is put metaphorically both for strength and power, and also for pride.” — *Cresswell*. Here it is threatened that the power and honor of the wicked, which had been employed as the instruments of cruel wrong and oppression, would be destroyed, and their pride effectually humbled; while the righteous would be exalted to power and dignity.

and more effectually protect themselves than if it were their endeavor to advance their own interests by every species of wickedness.

# PSALM 76

There is here celebrated the grace and truth of God in having, according to his promise that he would be the protector of the city of Jerusalem, defended it by his wonderful power against enemies, who were renowned for their warlike valor, and well equipped with everything requisite for war.

<sup>264</sup>

## *To the chief musician upon Neginoth. A Psalm of Asaph. A Song.*

This psalm, it is probable, was composed after the death of David; and, accordingly, some think that what is here described is that deliverance of the Jews from the Ammonites which took place in the reign of king Jehoshaphat. But I am rather inclined to adopt a different opinion, and to refer the psalm to that deliverance which they obtained from the Assyrians, recorded in 2 Kings 19. The Assyrians, under the conduct of Sennacherib, not only invaded Judea, but also made a violent assault upon the city of Jerusalem, the capital of the kingdom. The result of this is well known. They were compelled to raise the siege by the miraculous interference of God, who in one night destroyed that army with dreadful slaughter by the hand of his angel, (2 Kings 19:35.) <sup>265</sup> Hence the prophet, not inappropriately, affirms that God broke the arrows, the swords, and the shields. The point, however, which is chiefly necessary to be known and attended to is, that the continual care of God in defending the Church, which he has chosen, is here celebrated to encourage the faithful without any doubt or hesitation to glory in his protection.

### **Psalm 76:1-6**

**1.** God is known in Judah; his name is great in Israel. **2.** And his tabernacle was in Salem, and his dwelling-place in Zion. **3.** There he broke the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle. Selah. **4.** Thou art more glorious and terrible than the mountains of prey. **5.** The stout hearted were spoiled, they slept their sleep, <sup>266</sup> and all the men of might have not found their hands. **6.** At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob! the chariot and the horse were cast into a deep sleep.

**1.** *God is known in Judah.* In the outset, we are taught that it was not by human means that the enemies of Israel were compelled to retire without accomplishing any thing, but by the ever-to-be-remembered aid of Jehovah. Whence came *that knowledge of God and the greatness of his name* which are spoken of, but because He stretched forth his hand in an extraordinary manner, to make it openly manifest that both the chosen people and the city were under his defense and protection? It is therefore asserted, that the glory of God was conspicuously displayed when the enemies of Israel were discomfited by such a miraculous interposition.

<sup>264</sup> “Et bien equippez de toutes choses requises a la guerre.” — *Fr.*

<sup>265</sup> The inscription prefixed to the psalm in the Septuagint expressly mentions this as the occasion of its composition, Ὡδὴ πρὸς τὸν Ἀσσύριον; “An ode against the Assyrian.” If in this the version of the LXX. is correct, and if Asaph, to whom the psalm is ascribed, was the person of that name who lived in the time of David, one of his compositions must have been adopted as suitably descriptive of this remarkable deliverance. He may, however, have been a different person of the same name, and was probably one of his descendants, as has been before observed, (page 159,) who lived in the time of Hezekiah. Bishop Patrick and Calmet are of this last opinion. Those who adopt the former suppose that the original reference of the psalm was to the victory obtained by David over the Philistines in the valley of Rephaim.

<sup>266</sup> “N’ont peu trouver leurs mains.” — *Fr.* “Have not been able to find their hands.”

**2. And his tabernacle was in Salem** Here the reason is assigned why God, putting the Assyrians to flight, vouchsafed to deliver the city of Jerusalem, and to take it under his protection. The reason is, because he had there chosen for himself a dwelling-place, in which his name was to be called upon. The amount, in short, is, first, that men had no ground to arrogate to themselves any share in the deliverance of the city here portrayed, God having strikingly showed that all the glory was his own, by displaying from heaven his power in the sight of all men; and, secondly, that he was induced to oppose his enemies from no other consideration but that of his free choice of the Jewish nation. God having, by this example, testified that his power is invincible for preserving his Church, it is a call and an encouragement to all the faithful to repose with confidence under his shadow. If his name is precious to himself, it is no ordinary pledge and security which he gives to our faith when he assures us that it is his will that the greatness of his power should be known in the preservation of his Church. Moreover, as the Church is a distinguished theater on which the Divine glory is displayed, we must always take the greatest care not to shroud or bury in forgetfulness, by our ingratitude, the benefits which have been bestowed upon it, and especially those which ought to be held in remembrance in all ages. Farther, although God is not now worshipped in the visible tabernacle, yet as by Christ he still dwells in the midst of us, yea even within us, we will doubtless experience, whenever we are exposed to danger, that under his protection we are in perfect safety. If the earthly sanctuary of Jerusalem afforded to God's ancient people succor while it stood, we may rest assured that he will have no less care of us who live in the present day, when we consider that he has vouchsafed to choose us as his temples in which he may dwell by his Holy Spirit. Here the prophet, in speaking of Jerusalem, uses merely the name of *Salem*, which was the simple and uncompounded name of the city, and had been applied to it very anciently, as appears from Genesis 14:18. Some think that the name in the course of time assumed its compound form, by having *Jebus* prefixed to *Salem*; for *Jebus* was the name by which it was afterwards known in the intervening period, as we learn from the Book of Judges, Judges 19:10, it being so called because it was inhabited by the Jebusites. But we will be more correct as to the etymology of the word, if we derive it from the verb *yereh*, which signifies *will see*,<sup>267</sup> because Abraham said,

“God will look out for himself a lamb for a burnt-offering,” (Genesis 22:8.)

**3. There he broke the arrows of the bow.** We have here stated the particular way in which God was known in Judah. He was known by the wonderful proofs of his power, which he exhibited in preserving the city. Under these figures is described the destruction of the enemies of the chosen people.<sup>268</sup> They could not otherwise have been overthrown than by being despoiled of their armor and weapons of war. It is therefore said, that *the arrows, the swords, and the shields, were broken*, yea, all the implements of war; implying that these impious enemies of the Church were deprived of the power of doing harm. The fact indeed is, that they were wounded and slain, while their weapons remained uninjured; but this metonymy, by which what befell themselves is represented as happening to their implements of war, is not improper. Some translate the word *reshaphim*, *points of weapons*! Properly, it should be rendered *fires*;<sup>269</sup> but it is more accurate to take it for

<sup>267</sup> From *ra'ah*, *he saw*, or *beheld*

<sup>268</sup> “This seems to allude to the miraculous destruction of the Assyrian army, as recorded in Isaiah 27:36.” — *Warner*.

<sup>269</sup> “The Hebrew *reshaphim*, [here rendered *arrows*,] signifies fire, Job 5:7, where ‘sparks that fly upward’ are poetically expressed by *reshaphim*, ‘the sons of the fire.’ By metaphor it is applied to an ‘arrow’ or ‘dart’ shot out of a bow, and, by the swiftness of the motion, supposed to be inflamed. See Cant. 8, 6, where of love it is said, (not the *coals*, but) ‘the arrows thereof are arrows of fire,’ it shoots, and wounds, and burns a man’s heart, inflames it vehemently by wounding it. The poetical expression will best be

arrows. Even birds are sometimes metaphorically so called, on account of their swiftness; and flying is attributed to arrows in Psalm 91:6

It is farther added, (verse 4th,) that *God is more glorious and terrible than the mountains of prey* By *the mountains of prey*, is meant kingdoms distinguished for their violence and extortion. We know that from the beginning, he who exercised himself most in robbery and pillage, was the man who most enlarged his borders and became greatest. The Psalmist, therefore, here compares those great kings, who had acquired large dominions by violence and the shedding of human blood, to savage beasts, who live only upon prey, and their kingdoms to mountains covered with forests, which are inhabited by beasts inured to live by the destruction of other animals. The enemies of God's ancient people had been accustomed to make violent and furious assaults upon Jerusalem; but it is affirmed that God greatly surpassed them all in power that the faithful might not be overwhelmed with terror.

5. *The stout-hearted were spoiled*, The power of God in destroying his enemies is here exalted by another form of expression. The verb , *eshtolelu*, which we translate *were spoiled*, is derived from , *shalal*, and the letter , *aleph*, is put instead of the letter , *he*.<sup>270</sup> Some translate, *were made fools*;<sup>271</sup> but this is too forced. I, however, admit that it is of the same import, as if it had been said, that they were deprived of wisdom and courage; but we must adhere to the proper signification of the word. What is added in the second clause is to the same purpose, *All the men of might have not found their hands*<sup>272</sup> that is to say, they were as incapable of fighting as if their hands had been maimed or cut off. In short, their strength, of which they boasted, was utterly overthrown. The words, *they slept their sleep*,<sup>273</sup> refer to the same subject; implying that whereas before they were active and resolute, their hearts now failed them, and they were sunk asleep in sloth and listlessness. The meaning, therefore, is, that the enemies of the chosen people were deprived of that heroic courage of which they boasted, and which inspired them with such audacity; and that, in consequence, neither mind, nor heart, nor hands, none either of their mental or bodily faculties, could perform

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preserved by retaining some trace of the primary sense in the rendering of it — ‘fires or lightnings of the bow,’ *i e.*, those hostile weapons which are most furious and formidable, as fire shot out from a bow.” — *Hammond* Parkhurst renders “glittering flashing arrows,” or rather, “fiery, or fire-bearing arrows;” such as, it is certain, were used in after times in sieges and in battles; the βελιπεπρωμενα of the Greeks, to which Paul alludes in Ephesians 6:16, and the *phalarica* of the Romans, which Servius (on Virgil, *Æn.* lib. 9, 5, 705) describes as a dart or javelin with a spherical leaden head, to which combustible matter was attached, which being set on fire, the weapon was darted against the enemy; and when thrown by a powerful hand, it killed those whom it hit, and set fire to buildings. Walford has, “fiery arrows.” “The arrows,” says he, “are described as fiery, to denote either the rapidity of their motion, or that they were tinged with some poisonous drugs to render them more deadly.”

<sup>270</sup> The verb is in the praet. hithpahal; and it has , *aleph*, instead of , *he*, according to the Chaldaic language, which changes , the Hebrew characteristic of *hiphil* and hithpahal into

<sup>271</sup> As the verb signifies, *has plundered, spoiled*; and as it is here in the praet. *hithpahal*, which generally denotes reciprocal action, that is, acting on one's self, it has been here rendered by some, *despoiled themselves* of mind, *were mad, furious*. *Hammond* reads, “The stout-hearted have despoiled or disarmed themselves.” The Chaldee paraphrase is, “They have cast away their weapons.”

<sup>272</sup> “ , may be rendered *have not found their hands*, *i e.*, have not been able to use them for resistance, for the offending others, or even for their own defense.” — *Hammond* The Chaldee paraphrase is, “They could not take their weapons in their hands,” *i e.*, they could not use their hands to manage their weapons. In the Septuagint, the reading is, εὔρον οὐδὲν ταῖς χερσιν αὐτῶν; “they found nothing with their hands,” *i e.*, they were able to do nothing with them: the vast army of Assyrians, the most warlike and victorious then in the world, achieved nothing, but “returned with shame to face to their own land,” (2 Chronicles 32:21.)

<sup>273</sup> “*They slept their sleep*.” “They slept, but never waked again.” — *Hammond*. There may be here a direct allusion to the catastrophe which befell the Assyrian army during the night, when, as they were fast *asleep* in their tents, a hundred and eighty-five thousand of them were at once slain, Isaiah 37:36.

their office. We are thus taught that all the gifts and power which men seem to possess are in the hand of God, so that he can, at any instant of time, deprive them of the wisdom which he has given them, make their hearts effeminate, render their hands unfit for war, and annihilate their whole strength. It is not without reason that both the courage and power of these enemies are magnified; the design of this being, that the faithful might be led, from the contrast, to extol the power and working of God. The same subject is farther confirmed from the statement, that *the chariot and the horse were cast into a deep sleep at the rebuke of God* <sup>274</sup> This implies, that whatever activity characterised these enemies, it was rendered powerless, simply by the nod of God. Although, therefore, we may be deprived of all created means of help, let us rest contented with the favor of God alone, accounting it all-sufficient, since he has no need of great armies to repel the assaults of the whole world, but is able, by the mere breath of his mouth, to subdue and dissipate all assailants.

### Psalm 76:7-12

**7.** Thou, even thou, art terrible, and who shall stand before thy face when thou art angry? **8.** From heaven thou hast made thy judgment to be heard: the earth was afraid, <sup>275</sup> and was still, **9.** When God arose to judgment, <sup>276</sup> to save all the meek <sup>277</sup> of the earth. Selah. **10.** Surely the wrath of men shall praise thee, and the remainder of wrath thou wilt restrain. **11.** Vow and pay <sup>278</sup> to Jehovah your God: let all those who are round about him bring presents to him who is worthy to be feared, <sup>279</sup> [literally to the terrible one.] **12.** He will cut off the spirit of princes: he is terrible to the kings of the earth.

*7. Thou, even thou, art terrible.* The repetition of the pronoun *Thou*, is intended to exclude all others from what is here predicated of God, as if it had been said, Whatever power there is in the world, it at once vanishes away, and is reduced to nothing, when He comes forth and manifests himself; and, therefore, He alone is terrible. This is confirmed by the comparison added immediately after, which intimates that, although the wicked are so filled with pride as to be ready to burst with it, yet they are unable to abide the look and presence of God. But as he sometimes keeps silence, and seems merely to look on as an idle spectator, it is expressly asserted, that as soon as he begins to be angry, ruin will be near all the wicked. Although they may then for a time not only stand, but also rise above the clouds by their fury, we are here, notwithstanding, admonished that we ought to wait for the time of wrath. Let us also mark that this terror is denounced against the wicked in such a manner as that it sweetly draws all true believers to God.

<sup>274</sup> The *chariot and horse* may be put poetically for charioteers and horsemen. Chariots formed a most important part of the array in the battles of the ancients. See Judges 4:3. Instead of "both the chariot and the horse," Horsley reads, "both the rider and the horse." "It is not improbable," says he, "that the pestilence in Sennacherib's army might seize the horses as well as the men, although the death of the beasts is not mentioned by the sacred historian."

<sup>275</sup> "Dont la terre a eu frayeur." — *Fr.* "With which the earth was afraid."

<sup>276</sup> "Pour faire jugement." — *Fr.* "To execute judgment."

<sup>277</sup> "Tous les humbles." — *Fr.* "All the humble."

<sup>278</sup> "Rendez vos voeus." — *Fr.* "Pay your vows."

<sup>279</sup> "Ou, a cause de la frayeur." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, on account of fear."

**8.** *From heaven thou hast made thy judgment to be heard.* By the name of *heaven*, the Psalmist forcibly intimates that the judgment of God was too manifest to admit of the possibility of its being ascribed either to fortune or to the policy of men. Sometimes God executes his judgments obscurely, so that they seem to proceed out of the earth. For example, when he raises up a godly and courageous prince, the holy and lawful administration which will flourish under the reign of such a prince will be the judgment of God, but it will not be vividly seen to proceed from heaven. As, therefore, the assistance spoken of was of an extraordinary kind, it is distinguished by special commendation. The same remarks apply to *the hearing of God's judgment*, of which the Psalmist speaks. It is more for the divine judgments to sound aloud like a peal of thunder, and to stun the ears of all men with their noise, than if they were merely seen with the eyes. There is here, I have no doubt, an allusion to those mighty thunder-claps by which men are stricken with fear.<sup>280</sup> When it is said, *the earth was still*, it is properly to be referred to the ungodly, who, being panic-struck, yield the victory to God, and dare no longer to rage as they had been accustomed to do. It is only fear which has the effect of bringing them to subjection; and, accordingly, fear is justly represented as the cause of this stillness. It is not meant that they restrain themselves willingly, but that God compels them whether they will or no. The amount is, that whenever God thunders from heaven, the tumults which the insolence of the ungodly stir up, when things are in a state of confusion, come to an end. We are, at the same time, warned of what men may expect to gain by their rebellion; for, whoever despise the paternal voice of God which is loudly uttered, must be destroyed by the bolts of his wrath.

**9.** *When God arose to judgment.* The great object which God had in view in executing this judgment is now declared; which was, that he might furnish a proof of his fatherly love towards all his people. He is, therefore, introduced as speaking, not with his mouth, but with his hand, that he may show to all how precious in his sight is the salvation of all who fear and love him. Under the word *arise*, there is a reference to the inactivity and indolency ascribed by wicked men to God, an opinion which had led them to take so much liberty to themselves. God is then said to ascend into his judgment-seat, when he plainly indicates that he exercises a special care over his Church. The design of the passage is to show that it is as impossible for God to forsake the afflicted and innocent, as it is impossible for him to deny himself. It is to be observed that he is termed Judge, because he affords succor to the poor who are unrighteously oppressed. The appellation of *the meek or humble of the earth* is applied to the faithful, who, subdued by afflictions, seek not high things, but, with humble groaning, patiently bear the burden of the cross. The best fruit of afflictions is, when thereby we are brought to purge our minds from all arrogance, and to bend them to meekness and modesty. When such is the effect, we may conclude with certainty that we are under the guardianship and protection of God, and that he is ready to extend his aid and favor towards us.

**10.** *Surely the wrath of men shall praise thee.* Some understand these words as denoting, that after these enemies shall have submitted to God, they will yield to him the praise of the victory; being constrained to acknowledge that they have been subdued by his mighty hand. Others elicit a more refined sense, That when God stirs up the wicked, and impels their fury, he in this way

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<sup>280</sup> When an angel of the Lord descended to perform some mighty work with which he had been commissioned, thunders and earthquakes frequently accompanied the execution of his commission; and it is highly probable that both these phenomena accompanied such a stupendous display of power, as that which was afforded by the slaughter of one hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the army of Sennacherib. By *God's judgment being heard*, may accordingly be understood the thunder which was heard; and what follows, "The earth was afraid," may signify the earthquake which then took place.

affords a most illustrious display of his own glory; even as he is said to have stirred up the heart of Pharaoh for this very purpose, (Exodus 14:4; Romans 9:17.) Understood in this sense, the text no doubt contains a profitable doctrine, but this being, I am afraid, too refined an explanation, I prefer considering the meaning simply to be, that although at first the rage of the enemies of God and his Church may throw all things into confusion, and, as it were, envelop them in darkness, yet all will at length redound to his praise; for the issue will make it manifest, that, whatever they may contrive and attempt, they cannot in any degree prevail against him. The concluding part of the verse, *The remainder of wrath thou wilt restrain*, may also be interpreted in two ways. As the word *chagar*, signifies *to gird*, some supply the pronoun *thee*, and give this sense, All the enemies of the Church are not yet overthrown; but thou, O God! wilt gird thyself to destroy those of them who remain. The other interpretation is, however, the more simple, which is, that although these enemies might not cease to breathe forth their cruelty, yet God would effectually restrain them, and prevent them from succeeding in the accomplishment of their enterprises.<sup>281</sup> Perhaps, also, it would not be unsuitable to explain the verb thus, *Thou wilt gather into a bundle*, as we say in French, “*Tu trousseras*,” *i.e.*, *Thou wilt truss or pack up*. Let us therefore learn, while the wicked would involve in obscurity and doubt the providence of God, to wait patiently until he glorify himself by bringing about a happier state of things, and trample under foot their infatuated presumption, to their shame and confusion. But if new troubles arise from time to time, let us remember that it is his proper office to restrain the remainder of the wrath of the wicked, that they may not proceed to greater lengths. Meanwhile, let us not be surprised if we observe fresh outrages every now and then springing forth; for, even to the end of the world, Satan will always have partisans or agents, whom he will urge forward to molest the children of God.

**11. Vow and pay to Jehovah your God.** The faithful are now exhorted to the exercise of gratitude. As under the law the custom prevailed among the Jews of vowing sacrifices for singular blessings which God had conferred upon them, by which they solemnly acknowledged that their safety depended solely upon him, and that to him they were entirely indebted for it, they are called anew

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<sup>281</sup> Hammond’s statement of these two interpretations is clear and full. It is as follows: — “What [which Calvin renders, *thou wilt restrain*] signifies here, is not agreed among the interpreters, the word signifying 1. *to gird*, and, 2. *to restrain*. In the notion of *restraining*, it will have a very commodious sense, applied to Sennacherib, to whom this psalm belongs. For, as by the slaughter of the one hundred and eighty-five thousand in his army he was forced to depart, and dwell at Nineveh, 2 Kings 19:36; so, after his return thither, there are some remainders of his wrath on the Jews that dwelt there. We may see it, Tobit 1:18, ‘If the king Sennacherib had slain any, when he was come and fled from Judea, I buried them privily, (for in his wrath he killed many,)’ etc. This was the gleanings of his wrath, and this was ‘restrained’ by God; for he soon falls by the hands of his sons, Adrammelech and Sharezer, ‘as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god,’ 2 Kings 19:37. And to this sense Kimchi interprets it, ‘Thou shalt so repress the malice of our enemies, that the other nations shall not dare to fight against us;’ so likewise Aben Ezra. And thus it must be, if ‘the remainder of wrath’ be ‘man’s wrath,’ as the former part of the verse inclines it, ‘Surely the wrath of man,’ etc. But *chagar*, in the primary notion, signifies *girding or putting on, arraying oneself*. *Girding*, we know, signifies *putting on*, and is applied to garments, ornaments, arms: *chagar*, ‘Gird thy sword upon thy thigh,’ Psalm 45:3, and frequently elsewhere; and so ‘girding with gladness,’ is putting on festival ornaments. And in like manner here, in a poetical phrase, ‘Thou shalt gird on the remainder of wrath,’ parallel to ‘putting on the garments of vengeance for clothing,’ Isaiah 59:17, will signify God’s adorning and setting out himself by the exercise of his *vengeance*, vulgarly expressed by his *wrath*, and the word *chagar*, *wrath*, most fitly used with reference on *chagar*, the *wrath of man*, in the beginning of the verse. *Man’s* wrath is the violence, and rage, and blasphemy of the oppressor, upon the *meek* or poor man foregoing. This begins, goes foremost, in provoking God; and then *chagar*, *the remnant*, or second part of *wrath*, is still behind for God; and with that he *girds* himself, *i.e.*, sets himself out illustriously and dreadfully, as with an ornament, and as with an hostile preparation in the eyes of men. And so in this sense also it is agreeable to the context... In either sense, the parts of this verse are perfectly answerable the one to the other. To this latter rendering of *chagar*, the Chaldee inclines us, paraphrasing it by, ‘Thou hast girded on, *or* prepared, *or* made ready, the remainder of fury, (meaning by God’s fury,) for the destroying of the nations.’”



to engage in this exercise of religion; and by the word *pay* it is intended to inculcate steadfastness, — to teach them that they should not make merely a sudden and inconsiderate acknowledgement, but that they should also testify at all times that the remembrance of their deliverance was deeply fixed in their hearts. Their most important business, no doubt, was seriously to reflect with themselves that God was the author of their salvation; but still it is to be observed, that the solemn profession of religion, by which every man stimulates not only himself but also others to the performance of their duty, is far from being superfluous. In the second clause, those addressed seem to be the neighboring nations; as if it had been said, that such a special manifestation of the goodness of God was worthy of being celebrated even by foreign and uncircumcised nations.<sup>282</sup> But it appears to me, that the sense most agreeable to the context is, that these words are addressed either to the Levites or to all the posterity of Abraham, both of whom are not improperly said *to be round about God*, both because the tabernacle was pitched in the midst of the camp so long as the Israelites traveled in the wilderness, and also because the resting-place assigned for the ark was mount Zion, whither the people were accustomed to resort from all the surrounding parts of the country. And the Levites had intrusted to them the charge of the temple, and were appointed to keep watch and ward round about it. The word *lammora*, is referred to God by the majority of interpreters, and they translate it *terrible*. The term *fear* is, however, sometimes taken in a passive sense for God himself.<sup>283</sup> If it is applied to the Gentiles and to irreligious men,<sup>284</sup> the sense will be, that they shall be tributaries to God; because, being stricken with fear, they shall no longer dare to offer him any resistance. But it is more probable that this word has a reference to God, whom the prophet justly declares to be worthy of being feared, after having given such a remarkable proof of his power.

**12.** *He will cut off<sup>285</sup> the spirit of princes.* As the Hebrew word *batsar*, occasionally signifies *to strengthen*, some think it should be so translated in this passage. But as in the two clauses of the verse the same sentiment is repeated, I have no doubt that by the first clause is meant that understanding and wisdom are taken away from princes; and that by the second, God is represented in general as terrible to them, because he will cast them down headlong from their loftiness. As the first thing necessary to conduct an enterprise to a prosperous issue is to possess sound foresight, in which the people of God are often deficient from the great perplexity in which they are involved in the midst of their distresses, while, on the other hand, the ungodly are too sharp-sighted in their crafty schemes; it is here declared that it is in the power of God to deprive of understanding, and to inflict blindness on those who seem to surpass others in acuteness and ingenuity. The majority of princes being enemies to the Church of God, it is expressly affirmed, that He is sufficiently terrible to subdue all the kings of the earth. When it is said, that *their spirit is cut off*, or taken away from them, it is to be limited to tyrants and robbers whom God infatuates, because he sees that they apply all their ingenuity and counsels to do mischief.

<sup>282</sup> This is Kimchi's interpretation: He understands by "those round about God," the nations near the land of Israel, and so near God.

<sup>283</sup> In this sense it is employed in Genesis 31:53, "And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac."

<sup>284</sup> If it is thus applied, the reading will be, "Let all those who are round about him bring presents on account of fear."

<sup>285</sup> The word employed by Calvin is "Vindemiabit," which expresses the precise idea of the original verb, *yebtstor*. It is from *he cut off, brake off*, referring properly to grapes and other fruits. The reading of the LXX. is, "takes away."

# PSALM 77

Whoever was the penman of this psalm, the Holy Spirit seems, by his mouth, to have dictated a common form of prayer for the Church in her afflictions, that even under the most cruel persecutions the faithful might not fail to address their prayers to heaven. It is not the private grief of some particular individual which is here expressed, but the lamentations and groanings of the chosen people. The faithful celebrate the deliverance which had been once wrought for them, and which was a testimony of God's everlasting grace, to animate and strengthen themselves to engage in the exercise of prayer with the greater earnestness.

*To the chief musician upon Jeduthun. A Psalm of Asaph.*

## Psalm 77:1-6

**1.** My voice came to God, and I cried: my voice came to God, and he heard me. **2.** I sought the: Lord in the day of my trouble: my hand was stretched out in the night, and remitted not my soul refused to be comforted. **3.** I will remember God, and will be troubled: I will meditate, and my spirit will be oppressed [or overwhelmed] with sorrow. Selah. **4.** Thou hast held the watches of my eyes: I am troubled, and will not speak. **5.** I have recounted the days of old, the years of ancient times. **6.** I will call to remembrance my song in the night: I will commune with my heart, and my spirit will search diligently.

**1.** *My voice came to God, and I cried.* This is not a mere complaint, as some interpreters explain it, denoting the surprise which the people of God felt in finding that he who hitherto had been accustomed to grant their requests shut his ears to them, and was called upon in vain. It appears more probable that the prophet either speaks of the present feeling of his mind, or else calls to remembrance how he had experienced that God was inclined and ready to hear his prayers. There can be no doubt that he describes the greatness of the sorrow with which he was afflicted; and, in nay opinion, he denotes a continued act both by the past and the future tenses of the verbs. In the first place, he declares that he did not foolishly rend the air with his cries, like many who pour forth bitter cries without measure and at random under their sorrows; but that he addressed his speech to God when necessity constrained him to cry. The copula *and*, which is joined to the verb *cried*, should be resolved into the adverb of time *when*, in this way, *When I cried my voice came to God*. At the same time, he also shows, that although he had been constrained often to reiterate his cries, he had not given over persevering in prayer. What is added immediately after is intended for the confirmation of his faith: *And he heard me*. The copula *and*, as in many other places, is here put instead of the causal adverb *for*. The meaning is, that he encouraged himself to cry to God, from the consideration that it was God's usual manner to show his favor and mercy towards him.

**2.** *I sought the Lord in the day of my trouble.* In this verse he expresses more distinctly the grievous and hard oppression to which the Church was at that time subjected. There is, however, some ambiguity in the words. The Hebrew word , *yad*, which I have translated *hand*, is sometimes taken metaphorically for *a wound*; and, therefore, many interpreters elicit this sense, *My wound*

*ran in the night, and ceased not,* <sup>286</sup> that is to say, My wound was not so purified from ulcerous matter as that the running from it was made to stop. But; I rather take the word in its ordinary signification, which is *hand*, because the verb *ἔτετατο*, *niggera*, which he uses, signifies not only to run as a sore does, but also to be stretched forth or extended. <sup>287</sup> Now, when he affirms that he sought the Lord in the day of his trouble, and that his hands were stretched out to him in the night season, this denotes that prayer was his continual exercise, — that his heart was so earnestly and unweariedly engaged in that exercise, that he could not desist from it. In the concluding sentence of the verse the adversative particle *although* is to be supplied; and thus the meaning will be, that although the prophet found no solace and no alleviation of the bitterness of his grief, he still continued to stretch forth his hands to God. In this manner it becomes us to wrestle against despair, in order that our sorrow, although it may seem to be incurable, may not shut our mouths, and keep us from pouring out our prayers before God.

**3. *I will remember God, and will be troubled.*** The Psalmist here employs a variety of expressions to set forth the vehemence of his grief, and, at the same time, the greatness of his affliction. He complains that what constituted the only remedy for allaying his sorrow became to him a source of disquietude. It may, indeed, seem strange that the minds of true believers should be troubled by remembering God. But the meaning of the inspired writer simply is, that although he thought upon God his distress of mind was not removed. It no doubt often happens that the remembrance of God in the time of adversity aggravates the anguish and trouble of the godly, as, for example, when they entertain the thought that he is angry with them. The prophet, however, does not mean that his heart was thrown into new distress and disquietude whenever God was brought to his recollection: he only laments that no consolation proceeded from God to afford him relief; and this is a trial which it is very hard to bear. It is not surprising to see the wicked racked with dreadful mental agony; for, since their great object and endeavor is to depart from God, they must suffer the punishment which they deserve, on account of their rebellion against him. But when the remembrance of God, from which we seek to draw consolation for mitigating our calamities, does not afford repose or tranquillity to our minds, we are ready to think that he is sporting with us. We are nevertheless taught from this passage, that however much we may experience of fretting, sorrow, and disquietude, we must persevere in calling upon God even in the midst of all these impediments.

**4. *Thou hast held the watches of my eyes.*** <sup>288</sup> This verse is to the same effect with the preceding. The Psalmist affirms that he spent whole nights in watching, because God granted him no relief. The night in ancient times was usually divided into many watches; and, accordingly, he describes his continued grief, which prevented him from sleeping, by the metaphorical term *watches*. When

<sup>286</sup> This is the rendering in our English Bible, which Dr Adam Clarke pronounces to be “a most unaccountable translation.” The reading of the margin, however, “my hand,” favours the sense given by our Author.

<sup>287</sup> This is the translation adopted by many critics, and it appears to be the true signification of the passage. Thus Symmachus’ version is, ἡ χεὶρ μου νυκτοῦ ἐτέτατο διηνεκῶς, “my hand was stretched out by night continually;” and, in like manner, Jerome, “Manus mea nocte extenditur, et non quiescit.” Parkhurst renders the verse thus: “In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; my hand was stretched out by night and ceased not,” or, “without interruption.” With this agree the versions of Horsley, Mant, Fry, Adam Clarke, Walford, and others. The stretching out of the hand was an usual gesture in prayer. Instead of *ἔτετατο*, the Chaldee reads *ἔτετατο*, “mine eye trickled down,” which Archbishop Secker and Green think likely to be the true reading.

<sup>288</sup> Some of the Jewish commentators interpret this clause thus: “Thou holdest the brows of my eyes.” The eyebrows which protect the eyes were held, so that he could not shut them and obtain sleep. Sleep to a person in trouble has the effect of interrupting his sorrow for a time, and of weakening it by refreshing the body. It is, therefore, in such circumstances, a great blessing, and is earnestly desired. But to have this denied, and for the sufferer to have sleepless and wearisome nights appointed to him, is a great aggravation of his distress.

he stated a little before that he prayed to God with a loud voice, and when he now affirms that he will remain silent, there seems to be some appearance of discrepancy. This difficulty has already been solved in our exposition of Psalm 32:3, where we have shown that true believers, when overwhelmed with sorrow, do not continue in a state of unvarying uniformity, but sometimes give vent to sighs and complaints, while, at other times, they are silent as if their mouths were stopped. It is, therefore, not wonderful to find the prophet frankly confessing that he was so overwhelmed, and, as it were, choked, with calamities, as to be unable to open his mouth to utter even a single word.

5. *I have recounted the days of old.* There is no doubt that he endeavored to assuage his grief by the remembrance of his former joy; but he informs us that relief was not so easily nor so speedily obtained. By the *days of old*, and *the years of ancient times*, he seems not only to refer to the brief course of his own life, but to comprehend many ages. The people of God, in their afflictions, ought, undoubtedly, to set before their eyes, and to call to their remembrance, not only the Divine blessings which they have individually experienced, but also all the blessings which God in every age has bestowed upon his Church. It may, however, be easily gathered from the text, that when the prophet reckoned up in his own mind the mercies which God had bestowed in time past, he began with his own experience.

6. *I will call to remembrance my song in the night.* By *his song* he denotes the exercise of thanksgiving in which he had engaged during the time of his prosperity.<sup>289</sup> There is no remedy better adapted for healing our sorrows, as I have just now observed, than this; but Satan often craftily suggests to our thoughts the benefits of God, that the very feeling of the want of them may inflict upon our minds a deeper wound. It is, therefore, highly probable, that the prophet was pierced with bitter pangs when he compared the joy experienced by him in time past with the calamities which he was presently suffering. He expressly mentions *the night*; because, when we are then alone by ourselves, and withdrawn from the society and presence of men, it engenders in the mind more cares and thoughts than are experienced during the day. What is added immediately after with respect to *communing with his own heart*, is to the same effect. Solitude has an influence in leading men to retire within their own minds, to examine themselves thoroughly, and to speak to themselves freely and in good earnest, when no created being is with them to impose a restraint by his presence.

The last clause of the verse, *And my spirit will search diligently*, admits of a twofold exposition. The word *chaphas*, for *search diligently*,<sup>290</sup> being in the masculine gender, and the word *ruach*, for *spirit*, being sometimes feminine, some commentators suppose that the name of *God* is to be understood, and explain the sentence as if the Psalmist had said, There is nothing, O Lord! so hidden in my heart into which thou hast not penetrated. And God is with the highest propriety said to search the spirit of the man whom he awakens from his indolence or torpor, and whom he examines by acute afflictions. Then all hiding — places and retreats, however obscure, are explored,

<sup>289</sup> “The times were indeed greatly altered; formerly his sleep had been prevented by the joyfulness of his feelings, which prompted the voice of thanksgiving during even the shades of night; now his sleep is taken away by the severity of his disease, and the anguish of his soul, which was augmented by the contrast with his past happiness.” — *Walford*.

<sup>290</sup> “The verb *chaphas*, signifies such an investigation as a man makes who is obliged to *strip himself* in order to do it. Or, *to lift up coverings*, to search fold by fold; or, in our phrase, *to leave no stone unturned*. The Vulgate translates, *et scopebam spiritum meum*. As *scopebam* is no pure Latin word, it may probably be taken from the Greek, σκοπεω, *scopeo*, ‘to look about, to consider attentively.’ It is, however, used by no author but St Jerome, and by him only here, and in Isaiah 14:23, ‘And I will sweep it with the besom of destruction;’ ‘scopabo eam in scopa terens.’ Hence we see that he has formed a verb from the noun *scopae*; a sweeping brush or besom.” — *Dr Adam Clarke*

and affections before unknown are brought into the light. As, however, the gender of the noun in the Hebrew language is ambiguous, others more freely translate, *MY spirit hath searched diligently*. This being the sense which is most generally embraced, and being, at the same time, the most natural, I readily adopt it. In that debate, of which the inspired writer makes mention, he searched for the causes on account of which he was so severely afflicted, and also into what his calamities would ultimately issue. It is surely highly profitable to meditate on these subjects, and it is the design of God to stir us up to do this when any adversity presses upon us. There is nothing more perverse than the stupidity<sup>291</sup> of those who harden themselves under the scourges of God. Only we must keep within due bounds, in order that we may not be swallowed up of over much sorrow, and that the unfathomable depth of the Divine judgments may not overwhelm us by our attempting to search them out thoroughly. The prophet's meaning is, that when he sought for comfort in all directions, he could find none to assuage the bitterness of his grief.

### Psalm 77:7-10

**7.** Will the Lord cast off<sup>292</sup> for ever? and will he be favorable no more? **8.** Is his mercy quite gone for ever? Doth his oracle fail from generation to generation? **9.** Hath God forgotten, to be merciful? Hath he shut up his compassions in anger? Selah. **10.** And said, My death,<sup>293</sup> the years<sup>294</sup> of the right hand of the Most High.

**7.** and **8.** *Will the Lord cast off for ever?* The statements here made undoubtedly form a part of the searchings which engaged the Psalmist's mind. He intimates that he was almost overwhelmed by a long succession of calamities; for he did not break forth into this language until he had endured affliction for so long a period as hardly to venture to entertain the hope that God would in future be favorable to him. He might well argue with himself whether God would continue to be gracious; for when God embraces us with his favor, it is on the principle that he will continue to extend it towards us even to the end. He does not properly complain or find fault with God, but rather reasoning with himself, concludes, from the nature of God, that it is impossible for him not to continue his free favor towards his people, to whom he has once shown himself to be a father. As he has traced all the blessings which the faithful receive from the Divine hand to the mere good pleasure of God, as to a fountain; so a little after he adds the Divine goodness, as if he had said, How can we suppose it possible for God to break off the course of his fatherly layout, when it is considered that he cannot divest himself of his own nature? We see, then, how by an argument drawn from the goodness of God, he repels the assaults of temptation. When he puts the question, *Doth his word or oracle fail?* he intimates that he was destitute of all consolation, since he met with no promise to support and strengthen his faith. We are indeed thrown into a gulf of despair when God takes away from us his promises in which our happiness and salvation are included. If it is objected, that such as had the Law among their hands could not be without the word of God,

<sup>291</sup> "La stupidite brutale." — *Fr.* "The brutish stupidity."

<sup>292</sup> "Ou, sera-il eslongne." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, will he be at a distance."

<sup>293</sup> "C'est, ma maladie." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, my disease or sickness."

<sup>294</sup> "Ou, changemens." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, changes."

I answer, that on account of the imperfection of the former dispensation, when Christ was not yet manifested, <sup>295</sup> special promises were then necessary. Accordingly, in Psalm 74:9, we find the faithful complaining that they saw not any longer their wonted signs, and that there was no longer a prophet who had knowledge of the time among them. If David was the penman of this psalm, we know that in matters of doubt and perplexity it was usual with him to ask counsel from God, and that God was accustomed to grant him answers. If he was deprived of this source of alleviation in the midst of his calamities, he had reason to bewail that he found no oracle or word to sustain and strengthen his faith. But if the psalm was composed by some other inspired prophet, this complaint will suit the period which intervened between the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity and the coming of Christ; for, during that time, the course of prophecy was in a manner broken off, and there was none endued with any peculiar gift of the Holy Spirit to raise up the hearts of those who were cast down, or to support and keep them from falling. In addition to this, it sometimes happens that although the word of God is offered to us, it yet does not enter into our minds, in consequence of our being involved in such deep distress, as to prevent us from receiving or admitting the smallest degree of comfort. But I embrace the former sense, which is, that the Church was now without those special announcements of prophecy with which she had formerly been favored, and that as she still depended upon the mere sight of the shadows of that economy, she stood constantly in need of fresh supports. From this we may gather the profitable lesson, that we ought not to be unduly disquieted, if God should at any time withdraw his word from us. It should be borne in mind, that he tries his own people by such wonderful methods, that they imagine the whole of Scripture to be turned from its proper end, and that although they are desirous to hear God speaking, they yet cannot be brought to apply his words to their own particular case. This, as I have said, is a distressing and painful thing; but it ought not to hinder us from engaging in the exercise of prayer.

9. *Hath God forgotten to be merciful?* The prophet still continues debating with himself the same subject. His object, however, is not to overthrow his faith, but rather to raise it up. He does not put this question, as if the point to which it refers were a doubtful matter. It is as if he had said, Hath God forgotten himself? or, hath he changed his nature? for he cannot be God unless he is merciful. I indeed admit that he did not remain unshaken as if he had had a heart of steel. But the more violently he was assailed, the more firmly did he lean upon the truth, That the goodness of God is so inseparably connected with his essence as to render it impossible for him not to be merciful. Whenever, therefore, doubts enter into our minds upon our being harassed with cares, and oppressed with sorrows, let us learn always to endeavor to arrive at a satisfactory answer to this question, Has God changed his nature so as to be no longer merciful? The last clause, *Hath he shut up or restrained his compassions in his anger?* is to the same effect. It was a very common and notable observation among the holy patriarchs, That God is long — suffering, slow to wrath, ready to forgive, and easy to be entreated. It was from them that Habakkuk derived the statement which he makes in his song,

“Even in his anger he will be mindful of his mercy.” (Habakkuk 3:2)

The prophet, then, here comes to the conclusion, that the chastisement which he felt would not prevent God from being again reconciled to him, and returning to his wonted manner of bestowing blessings upon him, since his anger towards his own people endures only for a moment. Yea, although God manifests the tokens of his anger, he does not cease most tenderly to love those whom

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<sup>295</sup> “Qu’a cause de l’infirmite du temps, (ascavoir avant la manifestation de Christ).” — *Fr.*

he chastises. His wrath, it its true, rests continually upon the reprobate; but the prophet, accounting himself among the number of God's children, and speaking of other genuine believers, justly argues from the impossibility of the thing, that the temporary displeasure of God cannot break off the course of his goodness and mercy.

**10.** *And I said, My death, the years of the right hand, etc.* This passage has been explained in various ways. Some deriving the word , *challothi*, from , *chalah*, which signifies *to kill*, consider the prophet as meaning, that being overwhelmed with an accumulation of calamities, the only conclusion to which he could come was, that God had appointed him to utter destruction; and that his language is a confession of his having fallen into despair. Others translate it *to be sick, to be infirm or enfeebled*, which is much more agreeable to the scope of the passage.<sup>296</sup> But they differ with respect to the meaning. According to some interpreters, the prophet accuses and reproves himself for his effeminacy of mind, and for not setting himself more manfully to resist temptation.<sup>297</sup> This exposition may be admitted; for the people of God ordinarily gather courage after having for a time wavered under the shock of temptation. I, however, prefer a different interpretation, namely, that this was a disease merely temporary, and on this account, he compares it indirectly to death; even as it is said in Psalm 118:18,

“The Lord hath chastised me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death.” Also, “I shall not die, but live.” (Psalm 118:18)

He, therefore, I have no doubt, unburdens himself by cherishing the confident persuasion, that although he was at present cast down, it was only for a season, and that therefore it behoved him patiently to endure this sickness or disease, since it was not mortal. Nor are commentators agreed in the explanation of the second clause. Those who connect this verse with the preceding verses, think that the prophet was reduced to such a state of despondency at first, that he looked upon himself as utterly undone; and that afterwards he lifted up his head at times, even as those who are thrown into the deep in a shipwreck repeatedly rise above the water. Besides, they would have this to be understood as a word of encouragement addressed by some one to the prophet, desiring him to call to remembrance the years in which he had experienced that God was merciful to him. But it will be more appropriate to understand it thus:., Thou hast no reason to think that thou art now doomed to death, since thou art not laboring under an incurable disease, and the hand of God is wont to make whole those whom it has stricken. I do not reject the opinion of those who translate , *shenoth*, by *changes*;<sup>298</sup> for as the Hebrew verb , *shanah*, signifies *to change, or to do a thing*

<sup>296</sup> Walford translates, “Then I said, My disease is this. “Such,” he observes, “is the exact rendering of the text. Some painful disease had befallen him, which was heightened by the depression of his spirits, which deprived him of mental vigor and energy, and clothed every object in the blackest colours. ... ‘I said, This is my disease.’ My mind is oppressed by the mortified feelings of my corporeal frame, and on this account, the changes by which the hand of God has affected me appear in the darkest colours, and I am ready to give up every hope that he will ever display his goodness to me as he formerly did.”

<sup>297</sup> According to this view, he refers to what he had said in the 7th, 8th, and 9th verses, in which he seemed to arrive at the conclusion, that there would never be an end to his present afflictions, as if the decree had gone forth, and God had pronounced a final and irreversible sentence. But here he checks and corrects himself for having given utterance to such language, and recalls his thoughts to more just and encouraging sentiments respecting God. He acknowledges his sin in questioning or yielding to a feeling of suspicion in reference to the divine love, and the truth of the divine promises; and confesses that this flowed from the corruption of his nature, and the weakness of his faith; that he had spoken rashly and in haste; and that taking shame and confusion of face to himself, he would now desist and proceed no farther.

<sup>298</sup> Walford translates the verse thus: —

“Then I said, My disease is this,  
The change of the right hand of the High God.”

*again and again*, the Hebrews have taken from it the word , *shenoth*, which they employ to denote *years*, from their revolving character, from their turning round, as it were, in the same orbit. But in whatever way we may understand it, the comfort of which I have spoken will remain firm, which is, that the prophet, assuring himself of a favorable change in his condition, does not look upon himself as doomed to death. Others give a somewhat different interpretation, arriving at it in another way: <sup>299</sup> as if the prophet had said, Why shouldst thou not patiently endure the severity of God at this time, when hitherto he has cherished thee by his beneficence? even as Job said,

“Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not also receive evil?” (Job 2:10)

But it is more probable that the prophet directs his view to the future, and means that it became him to await the years or revolutions of the right hand of the Most High, until he should afford clear and undisputed evidence of the return of his favor towards him.

### Psalm 77:11-14

**11.** I will remember the works of God: surely I will remember thy wonderful works from the beginning. **12.** I will also meditate on all thy works, and I will muse on thy doings. **13.** Thy ways, O God! are in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God? **14.** Thou art the God that doest wonders: thou hast made known thy strength among the peoples.

**11.** *I will remember the works of God.* The prophet now, inspired with new courage, vigorously resists the temptations, which had so far prevailed against him as well nigh to overwhelm his faith. This remembering of the works of God differs from the remembering of which he had previously spoken. Then he contemplated from a distance the divine benefits, and he found the contemplation of them inadequate to assuage or mitigate his grief. Here he takes hold of them, so to speak, as assured testimonies of God’s everlasting grace. To express the greater earnestness, he repeats the same sentence, interjecting an affirmation; for the word , *ki*, is here used simply to confirm or enhance the statement. Having then, as it were, obtained the victory, he triumphs in the remembrance of the works of God, being assuredly persuaded that God would continue the same as he had shown himself to be from the beginning. In the second clause, he highly extols the power which God had displayed in preserving his servants: *I will remember thy wonderful works from the beginning.* *He* employs the singular number, *thy secret*, or *thy wonderful work*; but I have not hesitated to correct the obscurity by changing the number. We will find him soon after employing the singular number to denote many miracles. What he means in short is, that the wonderful power of God which he has always put forth for the preservation and salvation of his servants, provided we duly reflect upon it, is sufficient to enable us to overcome all sorrows. Let us learn from this, that, although sometimes the remembrance of the works of God may bring us less comfort than we would desire,

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“There is no authority,” he observes, “for the version, ‘I will remember the years;’ his meaning is, the power of God has changed and altered my condition; from a state of health and peace, he has brought me into disease, and pain, and sorrow. This, he says, he will remember, so as to inspire some hope that the power which had brought low would again raise him up.”

<sup>299</sup> Our Author seems to refer to those interpreters who, as in our English version, make the supplement, *But I will remember*, before the words, “the years of the right hand of the Most High.”



and our circumstances would require, we must nevertheless strive, that the weariness produced by grief may not break our courage. This is deserving of our most careful attention. In the time of sorrow, we are always desirous of finding some remedy to mitigate its bitterness; but the only way by which this can be done is, to cast our cares upon God. It, however, often happens, that the nearer he approaches us, the more, to outward appearance, does he aggravate our sorrows. Many, therefore, when they derive no advantage from this course, imagine that they cannot do better than forget him. Thus they loathe his word, by the hearing of which their sorrow is rather embittered than mitigated, and what is worse, they desire that God, who thus aggravates and inflames their grief, would withdraw to a distance. Others, to bury the remembrance of him, devote themselves wholly to worldly business. It was far otherwise with the prophet. Although he did not immediately experience the benefit which he could have desired, yet he still continued to set God before his view, wisely supporting his faith by the reflection, that as God changes neither his love nor his nature, he cannot but show himself at length merciful to his servants. Let us also learn to open our eyes to behold the works of God; the excellence of which is of little account in our estimation, by reason of the dimness of our eyes, and our inadequate perception of them; but which, if examined attentively, will ravish us with admiration. The Psalmist repeats in the 12th verse, that he will meditate continually upon these works, until, in due time, he receive the full advantage which this meditation is calculated to afford. The reason why so many examples of the grace of God contribute nothing to our profit, and fail in edifying our faith, is, that as soon as we have begun to make them the subjects of our consideration, our inconstancy draws us away to something else, and thus, at the very commencement, our minds soon lose sight of them.

**13.** *Thy ways, O God! are in the sanctuary.* Some translate *in holiness*, and they are led to do this, because it seems to them a cold and meagre form of expression to say, that *God's ways are in his sanctuary*. But as the rules of grammar will not easily admit of this, we must inquire whether a profitable truth may not be drawn from the term *sanctuary*, which is the proper signification of the original word *bakkodesh*. Some are of opinion that this is an abrupt exclamation, as if it had been said, *O God, who art in the sanctuary! O thy ways!* but of this I do not approve; for they do violence to the words of the prophet. The clause should be read in one connected sentence, and the word *sanctuary* is to be taken either for heaven or for the temple. I am rather inclined to refer it to heaven, conceiving the meaning to be, that the ways of God rise high above the world, so that if we are truly desirous to know them, we must ascend above all heavens. Although the works of God are in part manifest to us, yet all our knowledge of them comes far short of their immeasurable height. Besides, it is to be observed, that none enjoy the least taste of his works but those who by faith rise up to heaven. And yet, the utmost point to which we can ever attain is, to contemplate with admiration and reverence the hidden wisdom and power of God, which, while they shine forth in his works, yet far surpass the limited powers of our understanding. If it is objected, that it is wrong to attempt to confine to heaven the ways of God, which are extended through the whole world, the answer is easy; for although there is not a single corner of the globe in which God does not exhibit some proof of his power and operation, yet the wonderful character of his works escapes the eyes of men. If any would rather understand *sanctuary* as meaning the temple, it may be noticed, that we have met with an almost similar sentence in Psalm 73:16, 17,

“When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me,  
until I went into the sanctuary of God.”

The temple, indeed, in which God manifested himself was, as it were, a heaven on earth.<sup>300</sup> It is now obvious that the meaning of the inspired writer is, that as at the commencement he had uttered distressing complaints, so now, having attained to a calm and settled state of mind, he admires and adores the high ways of God, and conscious of his own weakness, quietly and modestly keeps himself within the bounds prescribed to him, not permitting himself to judge or pass sentence upon the secret judgments of God according to the dictates of his carnal understanding. He therefore immediately after exclaims, *Who is so great a God as our God?* By this comparison, he does not mean that there are many gods, but he indirectly rebukes the deep infatuation of the world who, not contented with the only true God whose glory is so conspicuous, invent for themselves many gods. If men would look upon the works of God with pure eyes, they would be led without much difficulty to rest with satisfaction in him alone.

**14.** *Thou art the God that doest wonders.* The Psalmist confirms the preceding sentence, proving the greatness of God from the wonderful character of his works. He does not speak of the hidden and mysterious essence of God which fills heaven and earth, but of the manifestations of his power, wisdom, goodness, and righteousness, which are clearly exhibited, although they are too vast for our limited understandings to comprehend. Literally, the words are, *Thou art the God that doest a Wonder*; but the singular number is here evidently put for the plural, an instance of which we have seen before. From this we learn that the glory of God is so near us, and that he has so openly and clearly unfolded himself, that we cannot justly pretend any excuse for ignorance. He, indeed, works so wonderfully, that even the heathen nations are inexcusable for their blindness. For this reason it is added, *Thou hast made known thy strength among the peoples.* This has an immediate reference to the deliverance of the Church; but, at the same time, it shows that the glory of God, which he had clearly and mightily displayed among the nations, could not be despised without the guilt of grievous impiety having been incurred.

### Psalm 77:15-20

**15.** Thou hast redeemed thy people by thy arm, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah. **16.** The waters saw thee, O God! the waters saw thee; they were afraid, yea even the deeps trembled. **17.** The clouds poured out waters, the heavens [or skies] sent forth a sound: thy arrows also went abroad. **18.** The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven; the lightnings illumined the world: the earth trembled and shook. **19.** Thy ways are in the sea, and thy paths in the great waters: and thy footsteps are not known. **20.** Thou didst lead thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

**15.** *Thou hast redeemed thy people by thy arm.* The Psalmist here celebrates, above all the other wonderful works of God, the redemption of the chosen people, to which the Holy Spirit everywhere throughout the Scriptures invites the attention of true believers, in order to encourage them to cherish the hope of their salvation. It is well known that the power of God was at that time manifested

<sup>300</sup> “*Thy way, O God! is in the sanctuary*; the temple, the Church of God, where he takes his walks and manifests himself, and where the reasons of his providence and dealings with his people are opened and made known unto them.” — *Dr Gill*.

to the Gentiles. The truth of history, indeed, through the artifice of Satan, was corrupted and falsified by many fables; but this is to be imputed to the wickedness of those in whose sight those wonderful works were wrought, who, although they saw them, chose rather to blind their eyes and disguise the truth of their existence, than to preserve the true knowledge of them.<sup>301</sup> How can we explain the fact that they made Moses to be I know not what kind of a magician or enchanter, and invented so many strange and monstrous stories, which Josephus has collected together in his work against Apion, but upon the principle that it was their deliberate purpose to bury in forgetfulness the power of God? It is not, however, so much the design of the prophet to condemn the Gentiles of the sin of ingratitude, as to furnish himself and others of the children of God matter of hope as to their own circumstances; for at the time referred to, God openly exhibited for the benefit of all future ages a proof of his love towards his chosen people. The word *arm* is here put metaphorically for power of an extraordinary character, and which is worthy of remembrance. God did not deliver his ancient people secretly and in an ordinary way, but openly, and, as it were, with his arm stretched forth. The prophet, by calling the chosen tribes *the sons of Jacob and Joseph*, assigns the reason why God accounted them as his people. The reason is, because of the covenant into which he entered with their godly ancestors. The two tribes which descended from the two sons of Joseph derived their origin from Jacob as well as the rest; but the name of Joseph is expressed to put honor upon him, by whose instrumentality the whole race of Abraham were preserved in safety.<sup>302</sup>

**16.** *The waters saw thee, O God!* Some of the miracles in which God had displayed the power of his arm are here briefly adverted to. When it is said that the *waters saw God*, the language is figurative, implying that they were moved, as it were, by a secret instinct and impulse to obey the divine command in opening up a passage for the chosen people. Neither the sea nor the Jordan would have altered their nature, and by giving place have spontaneously afforded a passage to them, had they not both felt upon them the power of God.<sup>303</sup> It is not meant that they retired backward because of any judgment and understanding which they *possessed*, but that in receding as they did, God showed that even the inanimate elements are ready to yield obedience to him. There is here an indirect contrast, it being intended to rebuke the stupidity of men if they do not acknowledge in the redemption of the Israelites from Egypt the presence and hand of God, which were seen even by the waters. What is added concerning *the deeps* intimates, that not only the surface of the waters were agitated at the sight of God, but that his power penetrated even to the deepest gulfs.

**17.** *The clouds poured out waters.* As the noun *mayim*, cannot be taken in the construct state, the verb, I have no doubt, is put transitively; but it makes little difference as to the sense, whether we take this view, or read as if *mayim*, were in the construct state and the verb passive; that is, whether we read, *The clouds poured out waters*, or, *The waters of the clouds were poured out*. The meaning obviously is, that not only the sea and the river Jordan, but also the waters which were suspended in the clouds, yielded to God the honor to which he is entitled, the air, by the concussion

<sup>301</sup> “Neanmoins il faut imputer cela a la malice de ceux qui ayans veu la chose eux-mesmes de leurs yeux, ont mieux aime s’esblouir la veue et desguiser le fait, que d’en entretenir la pure cognoissance.” — *Fr.*

<sup>302</sup> “The reason of Joseph’s being coupled with Jacob is, that as the Israelites derived their birth from Jacob, so they were sustained by Joseph in Egypt, who became to them a second parent.” — *Walford.*

<sup>303</sup> “‘The waters of the Red Sea,’ says Bishop Horne, ‘are here beautifully represented as endued with sensibility; as seeing, feeling, and being confounded, even to the lowest depths, at the presence and power of their great Creator, when he commanded them to open a way, and to form a wall on each side of it, until his people were passed over.’ This, in fact, is true poetry; and in this attributing of life, spirit, feeling, action, and suffering, to inanimate objects, there are no poets who can vie with those of the Hebrew nation.” — *Mant.*

of the thunder, having poured forth copious showers. The object is to show, that, to whatever quarter men turn their eyes, the glory of God is illustriously manifested, that it is so in every part of creation, above and beneath, from the height of heaven to the depths of the sea. What history is here referred to is involved in some degree of uncertainty.<sup>304</sup> Perhaps it is that which is recorded in Exodus 9:23; where we are informed, that hail mingled with thunder and lightning was one of the dreadful plagues inflicted upon the Egyptians. *The arrows which went abroad* are, no doubt, to be taken metaphorically for lightnings. With this verse we are to connect the following, in which it is said, that *the voice of the thunder was heard in the air, and that the lightnings illumined the world, so that the earth trembled*. The amount is, that at the departure of the people from Egypt, ample testimony was borne to the power of God, both to the eyes and the ears of men; peals of thunder having been heard in every quarter of the heavens, and the whole sky having shone with flashes of lightning, while at the same time the earth was made to tremble.

**19.** *Thy ways are in the sea.* The miracle which was wrought in drying up the Red Sea is here again described in different phraseology. What, properly speaking, refers to the Israelites is applied to God, under whose protection and guidance they passed dry-shod through the midst of the Red Sea. It is declared that a path had been opened up for them in a very strange and unusual manner; for the sea was not drained by the skill of man, nor was the river Jordan turned aside from its ordinary course into a different channel, but the people walked through the midst of the waters in which Pharaoh and his whole army were soon after drowned. On this account, it is said, that *the footsteps of God were not known*, for no sooner had God made the people to pass over than he caused the waters to return to their accustomed course.<sup>305</sup>

The purpose for which this was effected is added in the 20th verse, — the deliverance of the Church: *Thou didst lead thy people like a flock.*<sup>306</sup> And this deliverance should be regarded by all the godly as affording them the best encouragement to cherish the hope of safety and salvation. The comparison of the people to *sheep*, tacitly intimates that they were in themselves entirely destitute of wisdom, power, and courage, and that God, in his great goodness, condescended to perform the office of a shepherd in leading through the sea, and the wilderness, and all other

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<sup>304</sup> As in the three preceding verses the deliverance of the chosen people from Egypt, and the drying up of the Red Sea, to make a way for them to pass through, are the subjects celebrated, it is very natural to suppose that the 17th and 18th verses refer to the tempestuous rain, the thunder, lightning, and earthquake, by which God testified his wrath against the Egyptians, and by which that ruthless host were filled with dismay, when they went into the midst of the Red Sea after the Israelites. Of these particular circumstances, we have indeed no distinct information in the narrative of Moses; but from a comparison of what is here stated, with what is said in Exodus 14:24, “And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians,” it seems highly probable that they took place on that occasion. With this corresponds the representation given by Josephus of this part of Jewish History. “As soon as ever the whole Egyptian army was within it, the sea flowed to its own place, and came down with a torrent raised by storms of wind, and encompassed the Egyptians. Showers of rain also came down from the sky, and dreadful thunders and lightning, with flashes of fire. Thunder-bolts also were darted upon them; nor was there any thing which used to be sent by God upon men, as indications of his wrath, which did not happen at that time; for a dark and dismal night oppressed them.” — *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book II. chapter 16, section 3.

<sup>305</sup> “*Thy footsteps are not known*; not by the Egyptians, who essayed to follow after the people of Israel, with the Lord at the head of them, nor by any since; for the waters returned and covered the place on which the Israelites went as on dry ground; so that no footsteps or traces were to be seen at all ever since; and such are the ways of God, many of them in providence as well as in grace, Romans 11:33.” — *Dr Gill*.

<sup>306</sup> “After the sublime and awful imagery of the four preceding verses, in which thunders and lightnings, storms and tempests, rain, hail, and earthquakes, the ministers of the Almighty’s displeasure, are brought together and exhibited in the most impressive colours; nothing can be, more exquisite than the calmness and tranquillity of this concluding verse, on which the mind reposes with sensations of refreshment and delight.” — *Mant*.

impediments, his poor flock, which were destitute of all things, that he might put them in possession of the promised inheritance. This statement is confirmed, when we are told that Moses and Aaron were the persons employed in conducting the people. Their service was no doubt illustrious and worthy of being remembered; but God displayed in no small degree the greatness of his power in opposing two obscure and despised individuals to the fury and to the great and powerful army of one of the proudest kings who ever sat on a throne. What could the rod of an outlaw and a fugitive, and the voice of a poor slave, have done of themselves, against a formidable tyrant and a warlike nation? The power of God then was the more manifest when it wrought in such earthen vessels. At the same time, I do not deny that it is here intended to commend these servants of God, to whom he had committed such an honorable trust.

# PSALM 78

To comprehend many things within small compass, it is to be observed, that in this psalm there are two leading topics. On the one hand, it is declared how God adopted for himself a Church from the posterity of Abraham, how tenderly and graciously he cherished it, how wonderfully he brought it out of Egypt, and how varied were the blessings which he bestowed upon it. On the other hand, the Jews, who were so much indebted to him for the great blessings which he had conferred upon them, are upbraided for having from time to time perversely and treacherously revolted from so liberal a father; so that his inestimable goodness was clearly manifested, not only in his free adoption of them at first, but also in continuing by the uninterrupted course of his goodness to strive against the rebellion of so perfidious and stiff-necked a people. Moreover, mention is made of the renewal of God's grace, and as it were of a second election which he made when he chose David out of the tribe of Judah to sway the scepter over the kingdom of Israel.

*Asaph giving instruction.*

## Psalm 78:1-6

**1.** Hearken, O my people! to my law: <sup>307</sup> incline your ears to the words of my mouth. **2.** I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old time: **3.** What we have heard and known, and our fathers have related to us. **4.** We will not conceal from their children in the generation to come, recounting the praises of Jehovah, and his power, and the wonderful works which he has done. **5.** He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel: for he commanded our fathers to make them known to their children: **6.** That the generation to come might know them, and that the children to be born should arise and declare them to their children.

**1.** *Give ear, O my people! to my law.* From the close of the psalm, it may with probability be conjectured, that it was written long after the death of David; for there we have celebrated the kingdom erected by God in the family of David. There also the tribe of Ephraim, which is said to have been rejected, is contrasted with, and set in opposition to, the house of David. From this it is evident, that the ten tribes were at that time in a state of separation from the rest of the chosen people; for there must be some good reason why the kingdom of Ephraim is branded with a mark of dishonor as being illegitimate and bastard. <sup>308</sup>

Whoever was the inspired writer of this psalm, he does not introduce God speaking as is thought by some, but he himself addresses the Jews in the character of a teacher. It is no objection to this that he calls the people *his people*, and the law *his law*; it being no uncommon thing for the prophets

<sup>307</sup> "Ou, ma doctrine." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, my doctrine, or instruction."

<sup>308</sup> Calmet refers the composition of this psalm to the days of Asa, who, aided by the Syrians, obtained a signal victory over the Israelites, and brought back to the pure worship of God many out of the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon. See 2 Chronicles 15 and 16. Schnurrer supposes, that the special purpose for which it was composed was, to celebrate a decisive victory which had been gained over the kingdom of Ephraim or Israel by Abijah, the king of Judah during the reign of Jeroboam. Walford thinks this opinion highly probable. "There is," say's he, "an eulogy passed upon David at the conclusion of the psalm, which makes it likely that the author of it wished to conciliate the favor of the whole people towards David's successors, from whom Jeroboam had revolted: and in verse 9th, there is a reference to Ephraim which affords some degree of evidence in support of Schnurrer's hypothesis. Whatever may be thought of this hypothesis, we cannot hesitate to admit that the psalm itself is clear, pungent, and persuasive, and must have been felt to be so by the persons for whose use it was written."

to borrow the name of Him by whom they were sent, that their doctrine might have the greater authority. And, indeed, the truth which has been committed to their trust may, with propriety, be called *theirs*. Thus Paul, in Romans 2:16, glories in the gospel as *his gospel*, an expression not to be understood as implying that it was a system which owed its origin to him, but that he was a preacher and a witness of it. I am somewhat doubtful whether interpreters are strictly correct in translating the word *torah*, by law.<sup>309</sup> The meaning of it seems to be somewhat more general, as appears from the following clause, where the Psalmist uses the phrase, *the words of my mouth*, in the same sense. If we consider with what inattention even those who make great professions of being the disciples of God listen to his voice, we will admit that the prophet had good reason for introducing his lessons of instruction by a solemn call of attention. He does not, it is true, address the unteachable and obstinate, who frowardly refuse to submit themselves to the word of God; but as even true believers themselves are generally too backward to receive instruction, this exhortation, so far from being superfluous, was highly necessary to stir up the sluggish and inactive among them.

To secure for himself the greater attention, he declares it to be his purpose to discuss subjects of a great, high, and difficult character. The word *marshal*, which I have translated *a parable*, denotes grave and striking sentences, such as adages, or proverbs, and apophthegms.<sup>310</sup> As then the matter itself of which we treat, if it is weighty and important, awakens the minds of men, the inspired penman affirms that it is his purpose to utter only striking sentences and notable sayings. The word *chidoth*, which, following others, I have rendered *enigmas*, is here used, not so much for dark sentences, as for sayings which are pointed and worthy of special notice.<sup>311</sup> He does not mean to wrap up his song in ambiguous language, but clearly and distinctly to dwell both upon the benefits of God and the ingratitude of the people. Only, as I have said, his design is to stimulate his readers to weigh and consider more attentively the subject propounded. This passage is quoted by Matthew, (Matthew 13:35,) and applied to the person of Christ, when he held the minds of the people in suspense by parables which they could not understand. Christ's object in doing so, was to prove that he was a distinguished prophet of God, and that thus he might be received with the greater reverence. Since he then resembled a prophet because he preached sublime mysteries in a

<sup>309</sup> We have seen that Calvin, on the margin of the French version, reads *instruction*, and this reading is adopted by Street, Fry, Morison, and Walford.

<sup>310</sup> See volume 2, page 238, note 2.

<sup>311</sup> Walford translates *chidoth*, "all impressive record." His version of the first and second verses is,

"Hear, O my people! my instruction:  
Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.  
I will open my mouth with an instructive speech,  
I will utter an impressive record of ancient times."

"The words *law*, *parable*, and *dark sayings*," he observes, "which are found in the English translation of verses 1st and 2d, are not appropriate to the recitals which are contained in the psalm. They are here altered for others, which are in agreement with the subjects which follow, and may be supported by the usage of the original words which are employed." Similar is Street's note on this place. He translates *chidoth*, "pointed truths," and objects to its being translated *dark sayings* "There is nothing obscure in the psalm," says he, "it contains instructive historical truth, but no enigma. Therefore, the rendering of the English Bible, *dark sayings*, does not seem to be right. The Septuagint renders the word *διηγημα*, Ezekiel 17:2, and that rendering would suit this place better than *προβληματα* I have endeavored to express the relation of the word to *acutum est*." See volume 2 of this work, page 238, note 3. But as Dimock observes, "The several transactions of the Mosaic covenant hereafter recited, might be well called *parables* and *dark speeches*, or, as Arabic, *mysteries*, considered as types or figures of the Christian; and viewed in this light, afford ample matter of contemplation, serving not only as a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, but to keep us steadfast in faith and obedience to David our king."

style of language above the common kind, that which the sacred writer here affirms concerning himself, is with propriety transferred to him. If in this psalm there shines forth such a majesty as may justly stir up and inflame the readers with a desire to learn, we gather from it with what earnest attention it becomes us to receive the gospel, in which Christ opens and displays to us the treasures of his celestial wisdom.

**3.** *What we have heard and known.* There seems to be some discrepancy between what the Psalmist had stated in the commencement, when he said that he would speak of great and hidden matters, and what he now adds, that his subject is a common one, and such as is transmitted from one age to another by the father to the son. If it was incumbent upon the fathers to recount to their children the things here spoken of, these things ought, of course, to have been familiarly known to all the people, yea, even to those who were most illiterate, and had the weakest capacity. Where, then, it may be said, are the enigmas or dark sentences of which he has just now made mention? I answer, that these things can easily be reconciled; for although the psalm contains many things which are generally known, yet he illustrates them with all the splendor and ornaments of diction, that he may the more powerfully affect the hearts of men, and acquire for himself the greater authority. At the same time, it is to be observed, that however high may be the majesty of the Word of God, this does not prevent the benefits or advantages of it from reaching even to the unlearned and to babes. The Holy Spirit does not in vain invite and encourage such to learn from it: — a truth which we ought carefully to mark. If God, accommodating himself to the limited capacity of men, speaks in an humble and lowly style, this manner of teaching is despised as too simple; but if he rise to a higher style, with the view of giving greater authority to his Word, men, to excuse their ignorance, will pretend that it is too obscure. As these two vices are very prevalent in the world, the Holy Spirit so tempers his style as that the sublimity of the truths which he teaches is not hidden even from those of the weakest capacity, provided they are of a submissive and teachable disposition, and bring with them an earnest desire to be instructed. It is the design of the prophet to remove from the mind all doubt respecting his sayings, and for this purpose, he determines to bring forward nothing new, but such subjects as had been long well known, and received without dispute in the Church. He accordingly not only says *we have heard*, but also *we have known*. Many things are rashly spread abroad which have no foundation in truth; yea, nothing is more common than for the ears of men to be filled with fables. It is, therefore, not without cause that the prophet, after having spoken of the things which he had heard, at the same time, refers in confirmation of their truth to undoubted testimony. He adds, that the knowledge of these subjects had been communicated to the Jews by *their fathers*. This does not imply, that what is taught under the domestic roof is always faultless; but it is obvious, that there is afforded a more favorable opportunity of palming upon men forgeries for truth, when things are brought from a distant country. What is to be principally observed is, that all fathers are not here spoken of indiscriminately, but only those who were chosen to be God's peculiar people, and to whom the care of divine truth was intrusted.

**4.** *We will not conceal them from their children in the generation to come.* Some take the verb, *nechached*, in the *nephil* conjugation, and translate it, *they are not concealed or hidden*. But it ought, according to the rules of grammar, to be resolved thus: — *We will not conceal them from our posterity*, implying, that what we have been taught by our ancestors we should endeavor to transmit to their children. By this means, all pretense of ignorance is removed; for it was the will of God that these things should be published from age to age without interruption; so that being transmitted from father to child in each family, they might reach even the last family of man. The



end for which this was to be done is shown — that *they might celebrate the praises of Jehovah, in the wonderful works which he hath done*

**5.** *He established a testimony in Jacob.*<sup>312</sup> As the reception or approbation of any doctrine by men would not be a sufficient reason for yielding a firm assent to its truth, the prophet proceeds farther, and represents God as the author of what he brings forward. He declares, that the father's were not led to instruct their children in these truths under the mere impulse of their own minds, but by the commandment of God. Some understand the words, *He hath established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel*, as implying that God had established a decree in Jacob, to be observed as an inviolable rule, which was, that the deliverance divinely wrought for the people should be at all times in the mouth of every Israelite; but this seems to give too restricted a sense. I therefore consider *statute*, or *testimony*, and *law*,<sup>313</sup> as referring to the written law, which, however, was partly given for this end, that by the remembrance of their deliverance, the people, after having been once gathered into one body, might be kept in their allegiance to God. The meaning then is, that God not only acquired a right to the Jews as his people by his mighty power, but that he also sealed up his grace, that the knowledge of it might never be obliterated. And, undoubtedly, it was then registered as it were in public records, when the covenant was ratified by the written law, in order to assure the posterity of Abraham that they had been separated from all other nations. It would have been a matter of very small importance to have been acquainted with, or to have remembered the bare history of what had been done, had their eyes not been, at the same time, directed to the free adoption and the fruit of it. The decree then is this, That the fathers being instructed in the doctrine of the law themselves, should recount, as it were, from the mouth of God, to their children, that they had been not only once delivered, but also gathered into one body as his Church, that throughout all ages they might yield a holy and pure obedience to him as their deliverer. The reading of the beginning of the second clause of the verse properly is, *Which he commanded, etc.* But the relative *asher, which*, I have no doubt, is here put by way of exposition for *namely, or that is, he commanded*, etc. I have translated it *for*, which amounts to the same thing.

**6.** *That the generation to come might know them.* In this verse, the Psalmist confirms what he had said concerning the continued transmission of divine truth. It greatly concerns us to know, that the law was given not for one age only; but that the fathers should transmit it to their children, as if it were their rightful inheritance, in order that it might never be lost, but be preserved to the end of the world. This is the reason why Paul, in 1 Timothy 3:15, asserts that “the Church is the pillar and ground of the truth;” by which he does not mean that the truth of itself is weak, and stands in need of foreign supports, but that God extends and diffuses it by the instrumentality of his ministers, who when they faithfully execute the office of teaching with which they are invested, sustain the truth, as it were, upon their shoulders. Now, the prophet teaches us, that it is our bounden duty to use our endeavors that there may be a continual succession of persons to communicate instruction in divine truth. It is said of Abraham before the law was written, Genesis 18:19,

“I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment;”

<sup>312</sup> Horsley considers this verse as a parenthesis.

<sup>313</sup> Dr Adam Clarke, by *a testimony* understands the various *ordinances, rites*, and ceremonies prescribed by the laws and by the word *law*, the *moral law*.

and after his death, this was enjoined upon the patriarchs as a necessary part of their duty. No sooner was the law delivered, than God appointed priests in his Church to be public masters and teachers. He has also testified by the prophet Isaiah, that the same is to be observed under the New Testament dispensation, saying,

“My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, from henceforth and for ever.” (Isaiah 59:21)

In the passage before us, however, a particular injunction is given to the fathers on this point — each of them is enjoined diligently to instruct his own children, and all without distinction are taught, that their exertions in transmitting the name of God to their posterity will be most acceptable to Him, and receive his highest approbation. By the words, *That the children to be born should arise*, is not denoted a small number of individuals; but it is intimated, that the preachers of divine truth, by whose efforts pure religion may flourish and prevail for ever, will be as numerous as those who are born into the world.

### Psalm 78:7-11

**7.** That they might set their hope <sup>314</sup> in God, and not forget the works of God; but keep his commandments. **8.** And that they might not be as their fathers, a rebellious [or an apostatising] and a provoking generation; a generation which directed not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful towards God. **9.** The children of Ephraim, being armed and shooting with the bow, turned back in the day of battle. **10.** They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law. **11.** And they forgot his works, and the wonders which he had shown them.

*7. That they might set their hope in God.* Here the Psalmist points out the use to which the doctrine which he had stated should be applied. In the first place, the fathers, when they find that on the one hand they are instrumental in maintaining the pure worship of God, and that on the other, they are the means of providing for the salvation of their children, should, by such a precious result of their labors, be the more powerfully stirred up to instruct their children. In the second place, the children on their part, being inflamed with greater zeal, should eagerly press forward in the acquisition of divine knowledge, and not suffer their minds to wander in vain speculations, but should aim at, or keep their eyes directed to, the right mark. It is unhappy and wretched toil to be

“ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth,” (2 Timothy 3:7.)

When, therefore, we hear for what purpose the law was given, we may easily learn what is the true and most successful method of deriving benefit from it. The inspired writer places *trust* first, assigning it the highest rank. He then requires the observance of the holy commandments of God; and he puts in the middle the remembrance of the works of God, which serves to confirm and strengthen faith. In short, what he means is, that the sum of heavenly wisdom consists in this, that men, having their hearts fixed on God by a true and unfeigned faith, call upon him, and that, for

<sup>314</sup> “ , *kislam*, *their hope*, or *their constancy* , *folly*, by antiphrasis, *constancy*.” — *Bythner*

the purpose of maintaining and cherishing their confidence in him, they exercise themselves in meditating in good earnest upon his benefits; and that then they yield to him an unfeigned and devoted obedience. We may learn from this, that the true service of God begins with faith. If we transfer our trust and confidence to any other object, we defraud him of the chief part of his honor.

8. *And that they might not be as their fathers, a rebellious and provoking generation.* The Psalmist here shows still more distinctly how necessary this sermon was, from the circumstance that the Jews were exceedingly prone to revolt from God, if they were not kept in subjection by powerful restraints. He takes it as a fact, which could not be questioned, that their hearts were in no respect better than the hearts of their fathers, whom he affirms to have been a treacherous, rebellious, crooked and disobedient race. They would, therefore, immediately backslide from the way of God, unless their hearts were continually sustained by stable supports. The experience of all ages shows that what Horace writes concerning his own nation is true every where: —

*“Ætas parentum, pejor avis, tulit*

*Nos nequiores, mox daturos*

*Progeniem vitiosiorum.”*

*Odes, Book III. Ode vi.*

*“The age that gave our fathers birth,*

*Saw them their noble sires disgrace:*

*We, baser still, shall leave on earth*

*The still increasing guilt of our degenerate race.”*

**Boscawen’s Translation.**

What then would be the consequence, did not God succor the world which thus proceeds from evil to worse? As the prophet teaches the Jews from the wickedness and perverseness of their fathers, that they stood in need of a severe discipline to recall them from the imitation of bad examples, we learn from this, how great the folly of the world is, in persuading itself that the example of the fathers is to be regarded as equivalent to a law, which ought, in every case, to be followed. He does not here speak of all people without distinction, but of the holy and chosen race of Abraham; nor does he rebuke a small number of persons, but almost the whole nation, among whom there prevailed excessive obstinacy, as well as perverse forgetfulness of the grace of God, and perfidious dissimulation. He does not mention merely the fathers of one age, but he comprehends a period stretching back into a remote antiquity, that persons may not take occasion to excuse themselves in committing sin, from the length of time during which it has prevailed. We must therefore make a wise selection from amongst the fathers of those whom it becomes us to imitate. It being a work of great difficulty to remove the disposition to this perverse imitation of the fathers, towards whom the feeling of reverence is naturally impressed on the minds of their successors, the prophet employs a multiplicity of terms to set forth the aggravated wickedness of the fathers, stigmatising them as chargeable with apostasy, provocation, treachery, and hypocrisy. These are very weighty charges; but it will be evident from the sequel that they are not exaggerated. The word *hechin*, which I have rendered *directed*, is by some translated *established*, but in my opinion, the meaning rather is, that God’s ancient people always turned aside from God into crooked by-paths. Also, in what follows, instead of reading *whose spirit was not faithful towards God*, some read

*whose spirit leaned not upon God.* <sup>315</sup> But it is better to follow the former interpretation, That they were not faithfully and steadfastly devoted to God, although they had solemnly sworn allegiance to him. The Papists make use of this passage as an argument to prove that man has the power of bending his own heart, and directing it either to good or evil as he pleases; but this is an inference from it which cannot stand examination for a single moment. Although the prophet justly blames those who have not directed their heart aright, his object is not expressly to speak of what men can do of themselves. It is the special work of God to turn to himself the hearts of men by the secret influence of his Holy Spirit. It does not however follow from this, that they will be exempted from blame, when their own lust and depravity draw them away from God. Moreover, from the sins which are here reprov'd, we should learn in what way he would have us to obey and serve him. In the first place, we must lay aside all obstinacy and take his yoke upon us; <sup>316</sup> and, secondly, we must clothe ourselves with the spirit of meekness, bring the affections of the heart to the obedience of God, and follow after uprightness, and that not with the fervor of a mere transient impulse, but with unfeigned and unwavering steadfastness.

**9.** *The children of Ephraim being armed, and shooting with the bow.* The sacred writer sets before us an example of this unfaithfulness in the children of Ephraim. As those who are pertinaciously set upon doing evil are not easily led to repentance and reformation by simple instruction, the punishments with which God visited the children of Ephraim are brought forward, and by these it is proved that they were reprobates. Since they were a warlike people, it was an evidence of the divine displeasure for them to turn their backs in battle. And it is expressly declared, that they were skillful *in shooting with the bow*; <sup>317</sup> for it is an additional stigma to represent such as were armed with weapons to wound their enemies at a distance as fleeing through fear. From this, it is the more abundantly manifest that they had incurred the displeasure of God, who not only deprived them of his aid, but also made their hearts effeminate in the hour of danger.

Here the question may be raised, Why the children of Ephraim only are blamed, when we find a little before, all the tribes in general comprehended in the same sentence of condemnation? Some commentators refer this to the slaughter of the sons of Ephraim by the men of Gath, who came forth against them to recover their cattle of which they had been despoiled, 1 Chronicles 7:20, 21, 22. <sup>318</sup> But this exposition is too restricted. Perhaps the kingdom of Israel had fallen into decay, and had been almost ruined when this psalm was composed. It is therefore better to follow the opinion of other interpreters, who think, that by the figure synecdoche, the children of Ephraim are put for

<sup>315</sup> “The Syriac version reads, ‘And confided not in the God of its spirit,’ translating [the word which Calvin renders ‘was faithful,’] by a masculine verb; and this indeed the sense will very well bear, and the change of genders is not unusual, and God is frequently known by that title, ‘the God of the spirits of all flesh.’ See Numbers 16:22.” — *Hammond*

<sup>316</sup> “Premierement il faut que nous ostions toute obstination, avant que nous puissions avoir les cols propres pour recevoir son joug.” — *Fr.* In the first place, we must lay aside all obstinacy before we can bend our necks to receive his yoke.

<sup>317</sup> Of the Ephraimites shooting with the bow, or being archers, we have an intimation in Genesis 49:24, where, in Jacob’s blessing on Joseph, the father of Ephraim, it is said, “His bow abode in strength.”

<sup>318</sup> Dr Morison supposes, that the history here referred to, is that of the Israelites going up contrary to the divine command to take possession of the promised land, when, for their temerity, they were smitten and humbled before their enemies. (Deuteronomy 1:42.) “The tribe of Ephraim,” he observes, “is doubtless specially singled out, because they were the most warlike of all the chosen tribes, and because, perhaps, they led on the other tribes to the fatal act of rebellion against the expressed will of the God of Israel.” This, perhaps, may be considered as receiving some support from comparing the number of the tribe of Ephraim (Numbers 2:19) when they came out of Egypt, with their number when taken in the plains of Moab, at the termination of their wanderings in the wilderness, (Numbers 26:37.) At the former period, they amounted to 40,500, at the latter, to 32,500, eight thousand less; whereas, during those forty years the other tribes had considerably increased.

the whole people. But these interpreters pass over without consideration the fact, which ought not to be overlooked, that the Ephraimites are purposely named because they were the means of leading others into that rebellion which took place when Jeroboam set up the calves, (1 Kings 12:25-33.) What we have already said must be borne in mind, that towards the close of the psalm, the rejection of the tribe of Ephraim is, not, without cause, contrasted with the election of the tribe of Judah. The children of Ephraim are also here spoken of by way of comparison, to warn the true children of Abraham from the example of those who cut themselves off from the Church, and yet boasted of the title of the Church without exhibiting holy fruits in their life.<sup>319</sup> As they surpassed all the other tribes in number and wealth, their influence was too powerful in beguiling the simple; but of this the prophet now strips them, showing that they were deprived of the aid of God.

**10.** *They kept not the covenant of God.* This is the reason assigned for the Ephraimites turning their backs in the day of battle; and it explains why the divine assistance was withheld from them. Others, it is true, were guilty in this respect as well as they, but the vengeance of God executed on that tribe, which by its influence had corrupted almost the whole kingdom, is purposely brought forward as a general warning. Since then the tribe of Ephraim, in consequence of its splendor and dignity, when it threw off the yoke, encouraged and became as it were a standard of shameful revolt to all the other tribes, the prophet intended to put people on their guard, that they might not suffer themselves in their simplicity to be again deceived in the same manner. It is no light charge which he brings against the sons of Ephraim: he upbraids them on account of their perfidiousness in despising the whole law and in violating the covenant. Although he employs these two words, *law* and *covenant*, in the same sense; yet, in placing *the covenant* first, he clearly shows that he is speaking not only of the moral law, the all-perfect rule of life, but of the whole service of God, of the truth and faithfulness of the divine promises, and of the trust which ought to be reposed in them,<sup>320</sup> of invocation, and of the doctrine of true religion, the foundation whereof was the adoption. He therefore calls them covenant-breakers, because they had fallen from their trust in the promises, by which God had entered into covenant with them to be their Father. Yet he afterwards very properly adds *the law*, in which the covenant was sealed up, as it were, in public records. He aggravates the enormity of their guilt by the word *refuse*, which intimates that they were not simply carried away by a kind of thoughtless or inconsiderate recklessness, and thus sinned through giddiness, want of knowledge or foresight, but that they had purposely, and with deliberate obstinacy, violated the holy covenant of God.

**11.** *And they forgot his works.* This shameful impiety is here represented as having originated in ingratitude, inasmuch as they wickedly buried, and made no account of the deliverance wrought for them, which was worthy of everlasting remembrance. Truly it was stupidity more than brutish, or rather, as it were, a monstrous thing,<sup>321</sup> for the Israelites to depart from God, to whom they were under so many and strong obligations. Nor would it have been possible for them to have been so bewitched by Satan, had they not quite forgotten the many miracles wrought in their behalf, which formed so many bonds to keep them in the fear of God and in obedience to him. That no excuse might be left for extenuating their guilt, the prophet ennobles those works by applying to them the term *wonderful*, thereby intimating, that God's manner of acting was not of a common kind, so as

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<sup>319</sup> “Sans en montrer les fructs en leur vie.” — *Fr.*

<sup>320</sup> “De la verite et fidelite des promesses, et de la foy qu'on y doit adjouster.” — *Fr.*

<sup>321</sup> “A la verite une telle stupidite estoit plusque brutale, ou plustost comme une chose monstrueuse.” — *Fr.*

easily to account for their gradually forgetting his works, but that the Israelites had perversely and wickedly shut their eyes, that they might not be restrained in their sinful course, by beholding the glory of God.

### Psalm 78:12-16

**12.** He wrought marvellously [or he did wondrous things] in the sight of their fathers; in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.<sup>322</sup> **13.** He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through, and made the waters to stand as an heap. **14.** And he led them by a cloud in the day; and all the night by the light of fire. **15.** He clave the rocks in the wilderness: and made them to drink in great deeps. **16.** And he brought forth streams from the rock, and made the waters to run down like rivers.

**12.** *He wrought marvellously in the sight of their fathers.* The Psalmist is still to be regarded as condemning the posterity of the Israelites for their guilt; but he very properly, at the same time, begins to speak of the first ancestors of the nation, intimating, that the whole race of them, even from their first original, were of a perverse and rebellious disposition. But having remarked that the children of Ephraim had fallen into apostasy, because they had forgotten the wonderful works of God, he continues to prosecute the same subject. Meanwhile, as I have said, he makes a very happy transition to speak of the fathers, whom it was his object to include in the same condemnation. In the first place, he adverts to the miracles which were wrought in the midst of the land of Egypt, previous to the departure of the people from it. To recall these the more vividly to the mind, he names a place which was highly celebrated — *the field of Zoan*. He next comes to speak of the passage through the sea, where he repeats what was brought under our notice in the previous psalm, that the order of nature was reversed when the waters stopped in their course, and were even raised up into solid heaps like mountains. In the third place, he declares, that after the people had passed through the Red Sea, God still continued to be their guide in their journey; and that this might not be a mere temporary deliverance, he graciously continued to stretch forth his hand to bestow upon them new testimonies of his goodness. It being a difficult and wearisome thing for them to pursue their journey through dry and sandy regions, it was no ordinary blessing to be protected from the

<sup>322</sup> Zoan was the ancient capital of Egypt where the Pharaohs resided. Its great antiquity appears from the expression used respecting Hebron, in Numbers 13:22, where, to set forth the antiquity of that city, in which Abraham the tenth from Noah dwelt, it is said, that it “was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.” Zoan is twice specified in this psalm, here and in verse 43d, (though not mentioned in the history of the plagues in the book of Exodus,) as the scene of the wonderful works wrought on Pharaoh and the land of Egypt by Moses. This may mean, that these miracles were performed there in the sight of Pharaoh. Or *the field* or country of *Zoan*, may be put poetically for Egypt in general. Thus, in other poetical parts of Scripture, Zoan is sometimes used instead of Egypt, as in Isaiah 19:11, 13, where “the princes of Zoan” just mean the counsellors of Pharaoh; and in Isaiah 30:4, where, when God’s ancient people are represented as sending to Egypt for relief, it is said, that their “princes were at Zoan.” Zoan is rendered by the Chaldee , by the LXX. Τανις, by the Vulgate Tanis, and by the Coptic Tane, from the Coptic *ten*, plain, flat, level; being situated on the low ground of the Delta, on one of the Eastern branches of the Nile, bearing its own name, near a large lake, now called the Lake of Menzala, 44 miles west of Pelusium, 169 miles east of Alexandria, and three miles from the Mediterranean. There are ruins still remaining to mark the site of *Zoan* or *Tanis*, called *San* by the Arabs, comprising broken obelisks, capitals of the Corinthian order, a granite monument, etc. These ruins, however, are not thought to be of the highest antiquity.

heat of the sun by the intervention of a cloud. This, however, was to them a pledge of more distinguished grace. God hereby testified, that this people were under his protection, until they should reach the heavenly inheritance. Accordingly, Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 10:2, that there was a kind of baptism administered to the people in that cloud, as also in their passing through the sea; the fruit of which is not limited to this frail and transitory life, but extends even to everlasting salvation.

**15.** *He clave the rocks in the wilderness.* The Psalmist produces another evidence of the fatherly love by which God testified the greatness of the care which he exercised about the welfare of this people. It is not simply said that God gave them drink, but that he did this in a miraculous manner. Streams, it is true, sometimes issue from rocks, but the rock which Moses smote was completely dry. Whence it is evident, that the water was not brought forth from any spring, but that it was made to flow from the profoundest deeps, as if it had been said, from the very center of the earth. Those, therefore, who have interpreted this passage as meaning, that the Israelites drank in the bottomless deeps, because the waters flowed in great abundance, have failed in giving the true explanation. Moses, in his history of the miracle, rather enhances its greatness, by intimating, that God commanded those waters to come gushing from the remotest veins.

The same truth is confirmed in the following verse, in which it is stated, that where there had not been a single drop of water before there was a large and mighty river. Had there only sprung out of the rock a small rivulet, ungodly men might have had some apparent ground for cavilling at, and underrating the goodness of God, but when the water gushed out in such copious abundance all on a sudden, who does not see that the ordinary course of nature was changed, rather than that some vein or spring which lay hidden in the earth was opened?

### Psalm 78:17-22

**17.** Yet they continued still to sin against him, to provoke the Most High in the wilderness. **18.** And they tempted God in their heart, by asking food for their soul. <sup>323</sup> **19.** And they spake against God: they said, Can God prepare a table in the wilderness? **20.** Behold! he smote the rock, and the waters gushed out; and streams overflowed. Can he give bread also? Can he prepare flesh for his people? **21.** Therefore Jehovah heard, and was wroth: and a fire was kindled in Jacob: and wrath also ascended against Israel? <sup>324</sup> **22.** Because they believed not in God, nor trusted in his salvation.

**17.** *Yet they continued still to sin against him.* The prophet, having briefly declared how God, by a continual succession of benefits, had clearly manifested the greatness of his love towards the children of Abraham, now adds, that after having been laid under such deep and solemn obligations to him, they, as was natural to them, and according to their customary way, wickedly rebelled against him. In the first place, he accuses them of having provoked him grievously, by pertinaciously

<sup>323</sup> “Ou, a leur cupidite.” — *Fr. marg.* “Or, for their lust.”

<sup>324</sup> “The term *ascended* is figurative, derived from the ascending of the breath, in vehement gusts of agitation and anger.” — *Walford.*

adding iniquity to iniquity; and then he points out the particular kind of the provocation with which they were chargeable. By the word *provoke*, he intimates, that it was no light offense which they had committed, but wickedness so heinous and aggravated as not to be endured. From the place in which it was committed, he aggravates the enormity of the sin. It was in the very wilderness, whilst the remembrance of their deliverance was yet fresh in their memory, and where they had every day full in their view tokens of the presence of God, and where even necessity itself should have constrained them to yield a true and holy obedience — it was in that place, and under these circumstances, that they repressed not their insolence and unbridled appetite.<sup>325</sup> It was then, certainly, a proof of monstrous infatuation for them to act in such a wanton and disgraceful manner as they did, at the very time when their want of all things should have proved the best remedy for keeping them under restraint, and to do this even in the presence of God, who presented before them such manifestations of his glory as filled them with terror, and who allured them so kindly and tenderly to himself.

**18.** *And they tempted God in their heart.* This is the provocation of which mention is made in the preceding verse. Not that it was unlawful for them simply to ask food, when constrained to do so by the cravings of hunger. Who can impute blame to persons, when being hungry, they implore God to supply their necessities? The sin with which the Israelites were chargeable consisted in this, that not content with the food which He had appointed them, they gave loose reins to their lusts. He, at that time, had begun to feed them with manna, as we shall again see by and by. It was their loathing of that sustenance which impelled them eagerly to desire new food, as if they disdained the allowance assigned them by their heavenly Father. This is what is meant when it is said that *they asked food for their soul*<sup>326</sup> They were not reduced to the necessity of asking it by hunger; but their lust was not satisfied with living on the provision which God had appointed for them. On this account, it is declared, that *they tempted God*, overpassing, as they did, the bounds within which he had limited them. Whoever, undervaluing and despising the permission or license which He grants, gives full scope to his own intemperate lust, and desires more than is lawful, is said to tempt God. He acts as if he would subject Him to his own caprice, or questioned whether He could do more than he is pleased really to do. God has power to accomplish whatever he wills; and assuredly, the person who would separate the power of God from his will, or represent him as unable to do what he wills, does all he can to rend him in pieces. Those are chargeable with doing this, who are set upon trying whether he will grant more than he has given them permission to ask. That, therefore, the lust of the flesh may not stir us up to tempt him, let us learn to impose a restraint upon our desires, and humbly to rest contented within the limits which are prescribed to us. If the flesh is allowed to indulge itself without control, we will not be satisfied with ordinary bread, but will often, and in many ways, murmur against God.

**19.** *And they spake against God. The prophet had said that they tempted God in their heart;*<sup>327</sup> and now he adds, that they were not ashamed openly to utter with their impure and blasphemous

<sup>325</sup> “Qu’ils n’ont point reprime leur insolence et appetit desordonne.” — *Fr.*

<sup>326</sup> The word *nephesh*, for *soul*, has great latitude of signification. It sometimes signifies the sensitive or animal appetites, as in this passage. The people had their wants abundantly supplied, and yet they remained unsatisfied and querulous. It is therefore said, that *they demanded meat*, for their souls; *i. e.*, not for their real wants, which they might rationally and lawfully desire to have supplied, but to gratify their sensitive and carnal appetites. Our English Bible, and Calvin on the margin of the French version, give a very happy translation, *They tempted God, by asking meat for their lust*

<sup>327</sup> “‘They tempted God with their heart,’ that is, heartily, or with all their soul.” — *Walford.*



tongues, the impiety which they had inwardly conceived. From this, it is the more abundantly manifest that malignity and wickedness had taken entire possession of their hearts. Thus we see how lust conceives sin, when it is admitted into the soul with unhallowed consent. Afterwards the sin develops itself farther, even as we see the Israelites proceeding to such a length of profane wantonness, as to call in question the power of God, as if they made no account of it, any farther than as it ministered to their lust. By the *table prepared* which is spoken of, is to be understood the dainty food, which was their ordinary fare in Egypt. A single dish did not satisfy their appetite. They were not contented unless they could gratify themselves with great abundance and variety. When it is said in the following verse, *Behold! God smote the rock, and the waters gushed out, etc.*, this, I have no doubt, is the language of bitter irony, with which the prophet taunts their unblushing insolence. It is not very likely that they spake in this manner; but he relates, as it were, with their mouth, or in their person, the things which took place before their eyes.

**21.** *Therefore Jehovah heard, and was wroth.* This hearing of God implies full and perfect knowledge; and it is a figure taken from earthly judges, who cannot punish criminals until they have become thoroughly acquainted with the cause. He is said to hear his own people, when he shows his favor and mercy towards them by granting their requests; and, on the other hand, he is said to hear those blasphemies which he does not allow to pass unpunished. To remove all ground for thinking that the divine wrath was unduly severe, the enormity of the guilt of the Israelites is again described as manifested in this, that *they believed not God, nor trusted in his salvation*. It is here taken as an indisputable point, that promises were made to them to which they ought to have yielded an assent, which, however, they were prevented from yielding by the extreme infatuation with which they were carried away. *To trust in the salvation of God*, is to lean upon his fatherly providence, and to regard him as sufficient for the supply of all our wants. From this we learn not only how hateful unbelief is in the sight of God, but also, what is the true nature of faith, and what are the fruits which it produces. Whence is it that men quietly submit themselves to Him, but because they are persuaded that their salvation is singularly precious in his sight, and are fully assured that he will give them whatever is needful for them? It is thus that they are led to surrender themselves to him, to be governed according to his good pleasure. Faith, then, is the root of true piety. It teaches us to hope for, and to desire every blessing from God, and it frames us to yield obedience to him; while those who distrust him must necessarily be always murmuring and rebelling against him. The scope of the prophet is this, that the pretences to faith which are made by those who do not hope for salvation from God, rest upon false grounds; for when God is believed in, the hope of salvation is speedily produced in the mind, and this hope renders to him the praise of every blessing.

### Psalm 78:23-25

**23.** But he had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven, **24.** And had rained down manna <sup>328</sup> upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven. **25.** Man had eaten the bread of the mighty: he had sent them meat to the full.

<sup>328</sup> The manna received its name, either from *manah*, *he prepared, appointed, distributed*, to intimate that this food was prepared by God for the Israelites, and was their appointed portion which was daily distributed to them by measure; or, it is from

**23.** *But he had commanded the clouds from above.* It is a mistake to suppose that this miracle is related merely in the way of history. The prophet rather censures the Israelites the more severely from the consideration, that although fed to the full with manna, they ceased not to lust after the dainties which they knew God had denied them. It was the basest ingratitude to scorn and reject the heavenly food, which, so to speak, associated them with angels. Were a man who dwells in France or Italy to grieve and fret that he has not the bread of Egypt to eat, nor the wine of Asia to drink, would he not make war against God and nature, after the manner of the giants of old? Much less excusable was the inordinate lust of the Israelites, whom God not only furnished with earthly provision in rich abundance, but to whom he also gave the bread of heaven for their support. Had they even endured hunger for a lengthened period, propriety and duty would have required them to ask food with more humility. Had they been supplied with only bran and chaff to eat, it would have been their bounden duty to have acknowledged that in the place where they were — in the wilderness — this was no ordinary boon of Heaven. Had only coarse bread been granted them, they would have had sufficient reason for thanksgiving. But how much stronger were their obligations to God, when he created a new kind of food, with which, by stretching out, as it were, his hand from heaven, he supplied them richly and in great abundance? This is the reason why the manna is called *corn of heaven*, and *bread of the mighty*. Some explain the Hebrew word אֲבִירִים, *abbirim*, as denoting *the heavens*,<sup>329</sup> an opinion which I do not altogether reject. I, however, prefer taking it for *angels*, as it is understood by the Chaldee interpreter, and some others who have followed him.<sup>330</sup> The miracle is celebrated in high terms, to present the impiety of the people in a more detestable light; for it was a much more striking display of divine power for manna to be rained down from heaven, than if they had been fed either with herbs or fruits, or with other increase of the earth. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10:3, calls the manna *spiritual meat*, in a different sense — because it was a figure and symbol of Christ. But here the design of the prophet is to reprove the twofold ingratitude of the people, who despised not only the common food which was produced from the ground, but also the bread of angels. Some have translated the verbs in the past tense, *He commanded the clouds — he opened the doors of heaven — he rained down manna, etc.*<sup>331</sup> But to remove all ambiguity, I have thought it preferable to translate the verbs in the preterpluperfect tense, *He had commanded, he had opened, he had rained*, to enable my readers the better to understand that the prophet does

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the words הֲוֹי מַן, *huh man*, *What is this?* Exodus 15:16, being used for וְהָיָה in euphony. This was the question which they asked when they first saw this species of food, not knowing what it was.

<sup>329</sup> Abu Walid and Kimchi read, “the bread of heaven.”

<sup>330</sup> The Chaldee paraphrase of the expression, *the bread of the mighty*, is, “the food that descends from the dwelling of angels;” so that, according to this view, it signifies no more than, “corn of heaven,” by which the manna is described in the preceding verse. Dr Geddes and Williams observe, that the Hebrew word אֲבִירִים, *abbirim*, never signifies *angels*, but persons of the higher classes, the *rich*, the *great*, the *noble*; and that the meaning of the Psalmist is, that the Israelites found in the manna a dainty, delicate food, such as might suit the palates of the great; that it was bread fit for princes; the best, the choicest of bread. This agrees with Simonis’ rendering of the phrase, “*cibus nobilium, scilicet principum; hoc est, cibus exquisitus, delicatus, eximius.*” Such also is the view taken by Fry, Walford, and others. If by אֲבִירִים, *abbirim*, *the mighty*, angels should be understood, as it is rendered in all the ancient versions, the meaning will be substantially the same; for the manna, by an obvious poetical figure, may be called *the bread of angels*, to denote food of the most exquisite kind; just as Paul speaks of *the tongues of angels*, (1 Corinthians 13:1.) to indicate eloquence of the highest order.

<sup>331</sup> “Les autres ont traduit les verbes par un temps passe, Il a commande aux nuees, Il a ouvert les portes du ciel, Il a fait pluvioir la Manne,” etc. — *Fr.*

not here simply relate this history, but recalls it to remembrance for another purpose, as a thing which happened long ago.

### Psalm 78:26-31

**26.** He caused an east wind to blow in the heavens; and by his power he raised up the south wind. **27.** And he rained upon them flesh as dust, and feathered fowl <sup>332</sup> as the sand of the sea; **28.** And he caused it to fall in the midst of his camp, <sup>333</sup> round about his tabernacles. **29.** And they did eat and were filled, and he gave them their desire. **30.** They were not estranged from their desire: the meat was still in their mouth, **31.** When the wrath of God ascended against them, and slew the fat ones among them, and brought low the chosen of Israel.

**26.** *He caused an east wind to blow in the heavens.* We have here related how God granted the request of his people. This does not imply that he favourably regarded their fretful desires, but that he showed by the effect that it was in his power to do what they believed it to be impossible for him to accomplish. From this, we may perceive how injudiciously some expositors here join together *the flesh* and *the manna*. The reason why the flesh was given was altogether different from that for which the manna was given. God, in giving the manna, performed the office of a father; but by the flesh, he satisfied their gluttonous desires, that their very greediness in devouring it might choke them. It would not have been a difficult matter for God to have created quails in the midst of the wilderness; but he chose rather to bring them by the force of the winds, to teach the Israelites that all the elements are obedient to his command, and that the distance of places cannot prevent his power from immediately penetrating from the east even to the west. <sup>334</sup> That unbelieving people, therefore, were furnished with an undoubted proof of the power of *God*, from which they had malignantly detracted, in seeing all the elements of nature ready to obey and promptly to execute whatever he has commanded. Besides, he no doubt raised the winds according to the situation of the camp, although it would have been easy for him, without any means, to have presented flesh before them. It is stated, that *they did eat and were filled*, not only to intimate that God brought to them a large supply of birds, with which their bellies might be stuffed to the full; but also, that it was ungovernable lust which led them to ask flesh, and not a solicitude for having provision on which to live. It has been said above, that manna had been given them in the greatest abundance, but here it is intended expressly to censure their gluttony, in which they gave manifest proof of

<sup>332</sup> “Heb. ‘fowl of wing;’ *i.e.*, flying fowls, in distinction from domestic poultry.” — *Williams*.

<sup>333</sup> “Heb. *Of his camp*; either Israel’s camp or God’s camp; for seeing Israel was God’s people, and he dwelt among them, their camp was his camp.” — *Poole*.

<sup>334</sup> The Israelites were miraculously supplied with quails in the wilderness on two different occasions. The first occasion was upon the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from Egypt, and before they came to mount Sinai, Exodus 16:1, 12, 13. The second, which is the one here referred to, was at Kibroth-hattaavah, a place three days’ journey beyond the desert of Sinai, in the beginning of the second year after their departure from Egypt, Numbers 10:11; and 11:31-35. In both instances, the quails were sent in consequence of the murmuring of the Israelites. But in the first instance, they came up and covered the camp of Israel only one evening, while in the second, they came up from the sea for a whole month. No token of the divine displeasure accompanied the first miracle, God having, in his compassion, forgiven their murmuring; but the second miracle was wrought in wrath, and attended with the infliction of the divine vengeance on that rebellious people, (Numbers 11:33.)

their unbridled appetite. God promises, in Psalm 145:19, as a peculiar privilege to those who fear him, that “he will fulfill their desire;” but it is in a different way that he is here said to have yielded to the perverse desires of the people, who had cast off all fear of him; for that which his favor and loving-kindness would have led him to refuse, he now granted them in his wrath. This is an example well worthy of our attention, that we may not complain if our desires are frowned upon and crossed by the secret providence of God when they break forth beyond bounds. God then truly hears us, when, instead of yielding to our foolish inclinations, he regulates his beneficence according to the measure of our welfare; even as in lavishing upon the wicked more than is good for them, he cannot, properly speaking, be said to hear them: he rather loads them with a deadly burden, which serves to cast them down headlong into destruction.

The Psalmist expresses this still more clearly, by adding immediately after, (verses 30, 31,) that this pampering proved fatal to them, as if with the meat they had swallowed the flame of the divine wrath. When he says that *they were not estranged from their lust*, this implies, that they were still burning with their lust. If it is objected that this does not agree with the preceding sentence, where it is said, that “they did eat, and were thoroughly filled,” I would answer, that if, as is well known, the minds of men are not kept within the bounds of reason and temperance, they become insatiable; and, therefore, a great abundance will not extinguish the fire of a depraved appetite. Some translate the clause, *They were not disappointed*, and others, *They did not yet loathe their meat*. This last translation brings out the meaning very well; but it is too far removed from the signification of the Hebrew word , *zur*, which I have rendered *estranged*. The prophet intended to express in two words a present felt pleasure; for when God executed vengeance upon the people, they still indulged in the excessive gratification of the palate.<sup>335</sup> *The wrath of God* is said metaphorically *to ascend*, when he suddenly rises up to execute judgment; for when he apparently shuts his eyes and takes no notice of our sins, he seems, so to speak, to be asleep. The punishment was felt by persons of every condition among the Israelites; but *the fat ones*<sup>336</sup> and *the chosen* are expressly named, in order to exhibit the judgment of God in a light still more conspicuous. It did not happen by chance that the most robust and vigorous were attacked and cut off by the plague. As the strong are commonly deceived by their strength, and proudly exalt themselves against God, forgetting their own weakness, and thinking that they may do whatever they please, it is not surprising to find that the wrath of God burned more fiercely against such persons than against others.

## Psalm 78:32-37

<sup>335</sup> “*While their meat was yet in their mouth*; the meat of the quails, while it was between their teeth, ere it was chewed, and before it was swallowed down, while they were rolling this sweet morsel under their tongues, and were gorging themselves with it, destruction came upon them; just as Belshazzar, while he was feasting with his nobles, in the midst of his mirth and jollity, was slain by the Persians, Daniel 5:1, 30.” — *Dr Gill*.

<sup>336</sup> Mr Mudge observes, that this clause should be translated, “Slew them amidst their fatnesses or indulgences.” This is approved of by Lowth. Cocceius and Michaelis give a similar version.

**32.** For all this they still sinned, and believed not his wondrous works **33.** And he consumed their days in vanity, and their years in haste.<sup>337</sup> **34.** When he slew them, then they sought him; they returned, and hastened early to God. **35.** And they remembered that God was their Rock, and that the High God was their Redeemer. **36.** And they flattered him with their mouth, and lied to him with their tongue. **37.** But their heart was not right before him, neither were they faithful in his covenant

**32.** *For all this they still sinned.* It is a common proverb, that fools become wise when the rod is applied to them. Hence it follows, that those who have often been chastised of God, and yet are not thereby brought to repentance and amendment, are utterly to be despaired of. Such was the obstinacy of the Israelites here described. They could not be reformed by any of the afflictions which were sent upon them. It was a dreadful manifestation of the vengeance of God to see so many bodies of strong and vigorous men stretched dead on the ground. It was therefore a proof of monstrous obduracy, when they were not moved at such an appalling spectacle. By the expression *wondrous works*, is not only meant the plague just now spoken of: the other miracles, previously mentioned, are comprehended. There is, therefore, laid to the charge of the people a twofold wickedness; — they are accused not only of disbelieving the word of God, but also of despising the miracles which he wrought. For this reason, it is added, that their plagues were increased; even as God denounces and threatens by Moses, that he will deal sevenfold more severely with the obstinate and hardened who persevere in their wickedness.

**33.** *And he consumed their days in vanity.* As the Psalmist here speaks of the whole people, as if he had said, that all without exception were speedily consumed, from the least even to the greatest, this might with probability be referred to that most grievous punishment which was confirmed and ratified by the wrath of God — that they should all perish in the wilderness with only two exceptions, Joshua and Caleb; because, when already near the land of Canaan, they had turned back. That vast multitude, therefore, after they had shut against themselves the door of entrance into the Holy Land, died in the wilderness during the course of forty years. *Days* are put in the first place, and then *years*; by which it is intimated, that the duration of their life was cut short by the curse of God, and that it was quite apparent that they failed in the midst of their course. *Their days* then were consumed *in vanity*; for they vanished away like smoke: and *their years in haste*, because they passed swiftly away like a stream. The word *בהלה*, *behalah*, here translated *haste*, is by some rendered *terror*. I would rather prefer reading *tumult*; for it is undoubtedly meant that their life was taken away, as when in a tumult any thing is taken by force.<sup>338</sup> But I would not be disposed to change the word *haste*, which brings out the meaning more perspicuously. It was a display of righteous retribution, on account of their obstinacy, that their strength which made them proud, thus withered and vanished all on a sudden as a shadow.

**34.** *When he slew them, then they sought him.* By the circumstance here recorded, it is intended to aggravate their guilt. When under a conviction of their wickedness they acknowledged that they were justly punished, and yet did not with sincerity of heart humble themselves before God, but

<sup>337</sup> “This alludes to their appointed wanderings for forty years in the wilderness, as the punishment of their disobedience and rebellion; that all those who had left Egypt, and were grown to man’s estate, were dead, with the exceptions of Caleb and Joshua.” — *Warner*.

<sup>338</sup> “Que leur vie a este emportee comme quand en tumulte on ravit quelque chose.” — *Fr*.

rather mocked him, intending to put him off with false pretences, their impiety was the less excusable. If a man who has lost his judgment does not feel his own calamities, he is excusable because he is insensible; but he who is forced to acknowledge that he is culpable, and yet always continues the same, or after having lightly sought pardon, in fair but deceitful words, suddenly returns to his former state of mind, manifestly shows by such hollowness of heart that his disease is incurable. It is here tacitly intimated, that the punishments, by which a people so obstinate were constrained to seek God, were of no common or ordinary kind; and we are informed, (verse 35, <sup>339</sup>) not only that they were convinced of wickedness, but also that they were affected with a sense and a remembrance of the redemption from which they were fallen. By this means they are the more effectually deprived of all excuse on the ground of ignorance. The language implies that they were not carried away inadvertently, or deceived through ignorance, but that they had provoked the wrath of God, by dealing treacherously, as it were with deliberate purpose. And, indeed, God opened their eyes with the view of more openly discovering their desperate wickedness, as if, shaking off their hypocrisy and flatteries, he drew them from their lurking-places into the light.

**36.** *And they flattered him with their mouth, and lied to him with their tongue.* Here they are charged with perfidiousness, because they neither confessed their guilt with sincerity of heart, nor truly ascribed to God the glory of their deliverance. We are not to suppose that they made no acknowledgement at all; but it is intimated that the confession of the mouth, as it did not proceed from the heart, was constrained and not voluntary. This is well worthy of being noticed; for from it we learn, not only the duty incumbent upon us of guarding against that gross hypocrisy which consists in uttering with the tongue, before men, one thing, while we think a different thing in our hearts, but also that we ought to beware of a species of hypocrisy which is more hidden, and which consists in this, that the sinner, being constrained by fear, flatters God in a slavish manner, while yet, if he could, he would shun the judgment of God. The greater part of men are mortally smitten with this disease; for although the divine majesty extorts from them some kind of awe, yet it would be gratifying to them were the light of divine truth completely extinguished. It is, therefore, not enough to yield an assent to the divine word, unless that assent is accompanied with true and pure affection, so that our hearts may not be double or divided. The Psalmist points out the cause and source of this dissimulation to be, that they were not *steadfast and faithful*. By this he intimates, that whatever does not proceed from unfeigned purity of heart is accounted lying and deceit in the sight of God. Since this uprightness is every where required in the law, he accuses the people with being covenant-breakers, because they had not kept the covenant of God with that fidelity which became them. As I have observed elsewhere, there is always to be presupposed a mutual relation and correspondence between the covenant of God and our faith, in order that the unfeigned consent of the latter may answer to the faithfulness of the former.

## Psalm 78:38-41

<sup>339</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, a masoretic note is inserted after the 35th verse, , *chatsi ha-sepher, the middle of the book*, that is, with respect to verses.

**38.** Yet he, being merciful, expiated their iniquity,<sup>340</sup> and did not destroy them: and he multiplied to turn away his anger, and did not stir up all his wrath. **39.** And he remembered that they were flesh; a spirit<sup>341</sup> that passeth, and returneth not. **40.** How often did they provoke him in the desert, and grieve him in the wilderness! **41.** And they returned, and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.

**38.** *Yet he, being merciful, expiated their iniquity.* To show the more fully that no means had succeeded in bending the Israelites, and causing them to return to a sound state of mind, we are now informed that, although God bare with their multiplied transgressions, and exercised his mercy in forgiving them, they had no less manifested their wickedness in abusing his benignity in every instance in which it was displayed, than they had shown themselves refractory and obstinate when he treated them with severity. At the same time, the reason is assigned why they did not utterly perish. They no doubt deserved to be involved in one common destruction; but it is declared that God mitigated his anger, that some seed of them might remain. That none might infer, from these examples of vengeance which have been mentioned, that God had proceeded to punish them with undue severity, we are told that the punishments inflicted upon them were moderate — yea, mild, when compared with the aggravated nature of their wickedness. God kept back his hand, not looking so much to what they had deserved, as desiring to give place to his mercy. We are not, however, to imagine that he is changeable, when at one time he chastises us with a degree of severity, and at another time gently draws and allures us to himself; for in the exercise of his matchless wisdom, he has recourse to different means by which to try whether there is really any hope of our recovery. But the guilt of men becomes more aggravated, when neither his severity can reform them nor his mercy melt them. It is to be observed, that the mercy of God, which is an essential attribute of his nature, is here assigned as the reason why he spared his people, to teach us that he was not induced by any other cause but this, to show himself so much inclined and ready to pardon. Moreover, as he pardoned them not only in one instance, nor in one respect, it is affirmed that *he expiated their iniquity, that he might not destroy them*; and again, that although he had been oftentimes provoked, he yet ceased not to turn away his anger; and, finally, that he mitigated his chastisements, lest the people should be overwhelmed with the weight of them.

**39.** *And he remembered that they were flesh.* Another reason is now brought forward why God had compassion on the people, which is, his unwillingness to try his strength against men who are so constituted as to live only for a short period in this world, and who then quickly pass away; for the forms of expression here used denote the frailty by which the condition of men is made miserable. *Flesh* and *spirit* are frequently contrasted in the Scriptures; not only when *flesh* means our depraved and sinful nature, and *spirit* the uprightness to which the children of God are born again; but also when men are called *flesh*, because there is nothing firm or stable in them: as it is said in Isaiah, (Isaiah 31:3,) “Egypt is flesh, and not spirit.” In this passage, however, the *words flesh* and *spirit*

<sup>340</sup> “ , *yecapher*, made an *atonement* for their iniquity.” — *Dr Adam Clarke*

<sup>341</sup> “C’est a dire, souffle.” — *Fr. marg.* “That is to say, a breath.” *Dr Adam Clarke* translates, “the spirit goeth away, and it doth not return.” “The present life,” he observes, “is the state of probation; when, therefore, the *flesh*, the *body*, fails, the *spirit* goeth away into the eternal world, and returneth not hither again.” He considers the translation in our English Bible, “a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again,” to be a bad one, and that it may be productive of error; as if when a man dies, his being were ended, and death were an eternal sleep.

are employed in the same sense — *flesh* meaning that men are subject to corruption and putrefaction; and *spirit*, that they are only a breath or a fleeting shadow. As men are brought to death by a continual wasting and decay, the people are compared to a wind which passes away, and which, of its own accord, falls and does not return again. When we have run our race, we do not commence a new life upon the earth; even as it is said in Job,

“For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. But man dieth and wasteth away; yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?” (Job 14:7)

The meaning, then, as we may now clearly perceive, is, that God, in the exercise of his mercy and goodness, bare with the Jews, not because they deserved this, but because their frail and transitory condition called forth his pity and induced him to pardon them. We shall afterwards meet with an almost similar statement in Psalm 103:13-16, where God is represented as being merciful to us, because he sees that we are like grass, and that we soon wither and become dry like hay. Now, if God find in us nothing but misery to move him to compassion, it follows that it is solely his own pure and undeserved goodness which induces him to sustain us. When it is affirmed that men *return not*, when they have finished the course of their life in this world, it is not meant to exclude the hope of a future resurrection; for men are contemplated only as they are in themselves, and it is merely their state on earth which is spoken of. With respect to the renovation of man to the heavenly life, it is a miracle far surpassing nature. In the same sense it is said, in another place, “His spirit goeth forth, and returneth not,” (Wisdom 16:14;) language which implies that men, when they are born into the world, do not bring with them the hope of future restoration, which must be derived from the grace of regeneration.

**40.** *How often did they provoke him in the desert?* Here the preceding sentence is confirmed, it being declared that, as they had in so many instances provoked God in the wilderness, by the vast accumulation of their sins, <sup>342</sup> they must of necessity have perished a thousand times, had not God as often shown himself favorable and merciful towards them. The interrogatory form of the sentence expresses more significantly that they continued sinning without intermission. The word *wilderness* includes in it the circumstance both of place and of time. By this it is intended, first, to reprove their ingratitude, in that the memory of God’s benefits, while still so fresh in their minds, and even the sight of them daily before their eyes, were not at least able to check them in their wickedness; and, secondly, to condemn their impetuous and infatuated recklessness, in heaping up such a multitude of sins within so short a period.

In the same sense it is added immediately after, (verse 41,) that *they returned* to their former ways, and *tempted God*. The word *return* does not here signify change, but a continued course of sinning. The heinous indignity which is done to God when men tempt him, is expressed by a beautiful metaphor. The Hebrew word , *tavah*, signifies *to mark out* or *describe*. It is intimated, that when the people dared to limit the operations of God, according to their own pleasure, he was,

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<sup>342</sup> “They provoked God at least ten times, (Numbers 14:22,) during the first two years of their journey through the wilderness. 1. at the Red Sea, (Exodus 14:11, 12;) 2. at the waters of Marah, (Exodus 15:24;) 3. in the wilderness of Sin, (Exodus 15:2;) 4. when they kept the manna until the following day, (Exodus 16:10;) 5. when the manna was collected on the Sabbath, (Exodus 16:27;) 6. in Rephidim, where there was no water, (Numbers 20:2, 13;) 7. at Horeb, when a molten calf was made, (Exodus 32:1, etc.); 8. at Taberah, (Numbers 11:1, 2, 3;) 9. when they lusted for flesh, (Numbers 11:4;) 10. when they murmured at the news brought by the men, who had been sent to search the land, (Numbers 14:1, etc.)” — *Cresswell*.



as it were, shut up within bars of wood or iron, and his infinite power circumscribed within the narrow boundaries to which unbelief would confine it. And assuredly, whenever men do not go beyond their own understandings, it is as if they would measure God by their own small capacity, which is nothing else than to pull him down from his throne; for his Majesty must be brought into subjection to us, if we would have him to be regulated according to our own fancy.

## Psalm 78:42-51

**42.** They remembered not his hand in the day that he delivered them from the oppressor: <sup>343</sup>  
**43.** When he set his signs in Egypt, and his miracles in the field of Zoan. **44.** When he turned their rivers into blood; and their streams, that they could not drink. **45.** He sent among them a mixture <sup>344</sup> which devoured them; and the frog which destroyed them. **46.** And he gave their fruit [or produce] to the caterpillar, <sup>345</sup> and their labor to the grasshopper. <sup>346</sup> **47.** And he destroyed their

<sup>343</sup> That is, Pharaoh, as the next verse shows. See Psalm 107:2.

<sup>344</sup> This is the literal rendering of the original word , *arob*, which is derived from the verb , *arab*, *he mingled*. It is not agreed among interpreters what is meant by this name given here, and in Exodus 8:21, and in Psalm 105:31, to one of the plagues which fell upon the Egyptians. The Chaldee has “a mixture of living creatures of the wood.” “*A mixture*; a mixed collection of beasts,” says Bythner. In our English Bible, it is “divers sorts of flies.” Others read, “swarms of flies.” Bishop Mant reads, “the ravening fly;” Fry, simply “the fly;” and Walford, “the horse-fly.” “The Seventy,” says Mant, “have rendered the original word translated ‘fly,’ when spoken of the Egyptian plague, constantly by *κυνομύα*, ‘the dog-fly;’ whence it is plain those translators thought it meant some particular species of fly, in opposition to those who are of opinion that it meant ‘all sorts of flies.’ (See Parkhurst on .) What particular species was intended has been much doubted. Bruce, however, seems to have decided the question, and fixed the insect to be the Ethiopian fly, called Zimb, of which he has given a particular description. Some of its effects are thus represented by him. ‘As soon as this plague appears, and their buzzing is heard, all the cattle forsake their food, and run wildly about the plain, till they die, worn out with fatigue, fright, and hunger. No remedy remains but to leave the black earth, and hasten down to the sands of Atbara; and there they remain, while the rains last, this cruel enemy not daring to pursue them further. Though his size be immense, as is his strength, and his body covered with a thick skin, defended with strong hair, yet even the camel is not capable of sustaining the violent punctures the fly makes with his pointed proboscis. When once attacked by this fly, his body, head, and legs, break out into large bosses, which swell, break, and putrefy, to the certain destruction of the creature. Even the elephant and rhinoceros, which, by reason of their enormous bulk, and the vast quantity of food and water they daily need, cannot shift to desert and dry places, as the season may require, are obliged to roll themselves in mud and mire; which, when dry, coats them over like armor, and enables them to stand their ground against this winged assassin.’” — *Mant*

<sup>345</sup> , *chasil*, which is derived from , *chasal*, *to consume, eat up*, denotes a species of insect, so called from its devouring the fruits of the earth. But we are so little acquainted with the various kinds of destructive insects that ravage the Eastern countries, that it is somewhat difficult to determine the particular species meant by this term. It is distinguished from the locust in Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple, 2 Chronicles 6:28, and in Joel 1:4, where it is mentioned as eating up what the locusts had left. Harmer is of opinion that it is the species of insects now called *sim* in Persia, referred to in the following extract from Sir John Chardin’s Travels: — “Persia is subject to have its harvests spoiled by hail, by drought, or by insects, either locusts or small insects which they call *sim*, which are small white lice, which fix themselves on the foot of the stalk of corn, gnaw it, and make it die. It is rare for a year to be exempt from one or other of these scourges, which affect the ploughed lands and the gardens,” etc. On this Harmer observes, “The enumeration by Solomon and that of this modern writer, though not exactly alike, yet so nearly resemble each other, that one would be inclined to believe these small insects are what Solomon meant by the word [ , *chasil*] translated ‘caterpillars’ in our English version.” — *Harmer’s Observations*, volume 3, page 316. , *chasil*, is rendered βρουχος by the LXX., in 2 Chronicles 6:28, and by Aquila here, and also by the Vulgate in Chronicles and in Isaiah 33:4, and it is rendered by Jerome here, *bruchus*, “the chaffer,” which every one knows to be a great devourer of the leaves of trees. The Syriac in Joel 1:4, 2:25, renders it, , *tzartzooro*, which Michaelis, (Supplem. ad Lex. Heb., page 865,) from the Arabic , *tsartzar*, a cricket, interprets the *mole-cricket*, which, in its grub state, is also very destructive to corn, grass, and other vegetables, by cankering the roots on which it feeds. — See *Parkhurst’s Lexicon* on

<sup>346</sup> The Hebrew word here translated “grasshopper” is, , *arbeh*, which properly means “locust.” The locust receives no fewer than ten different names in Scripture, each of which indicates something characteristic. It is called , *arbeh*, from its extraordinary

vines with hail, and their wild fig-trees<sup>347</sup> with hail stones.<sup>348</sup> **48.** And he gave up their cattle to the hail; and their flocks to thunderbolts. **49.** He sent upon them the fierceness of his wrath, fury, anger, and affliction, and sent evil angels among them. **50.** He made a way to his anger: he kept not their soul from death, and shut up their cattle<sup>349</sup> to the pestilence. **51.** And he smote all the first-born in Egypt: the first-fruits of their strength<sup>350</sup> in the tents of Ham.

**42.** *They remembered not his hand.* The sacred writer still continues to upbraid the Israelites; for the simple remembrance of God's benefits might have restrained them, had they not wilfully and perversely forgotten whatever they had experienced. From this impious forgetfulness proceed waywardness and all rebellion. *The hand of God*, as is well known, is by the figure metonymy taken for his power. In the deliverance of the chosen tribes from Egypt here celebrated, the hand of God was stretched forth in a new and an unusual manner. And their impiety, against which the prophet now inveighs, was rendered the more detestable, from the fact that they accounted as nothing, or soon forgot, that which no length of time ought to have effaced from their memory. Farther, he recounts certain examples of the power of God, which he calls first *signs*, and then *miracles*, (verse 43,) that, by the recital of these, he may again rebuke the shameful stupidity of the people. By both these words he expresses the same thing; but in the second clause of the verse, the word *miracles* gives additional emphasis, implying that, by such strange and unheard-of events, the Egyptians had at that time been stricken with such terror as ought not to have vanished so speedily from the minds of the Israelites.

**44.** *When he turned their rivers into blood.* The Psalmist does not enumerate in their order the miracles by which God gave evidence of his power in the deliverance of his people. He considered it enough to bring to their remembrance the well-known histories of these events, which would be sufficient to lay open the wickedness and ingratitude with which they were chargeable; nor is it

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fecundity. No animal is more prolific; nor has Providence ever employed an agency more effective in destroying the fruits of the earth. Dr Russell, in his Natural History of Aleppo, observes that locusts "sometimes arrive in such incredible multitudes as it would appear fabulous to relate, destroying the whole of the verdure wherever they pass." A Traveller in Syria says, "That country, together with Egypt, Persia, and almost all the whole middle part of Asia, partakes in another scourge besides volcanoes and earthquakes, and that no less terrible; I mean those clouds of locusts of which travelers have spoken: the quantity of these insects is incredible to any man who has not seen it: the earth is covered by them for several leagues round. One may hear at a distance the noise they make in brousing the plants and trees, like an army plundering in secret. It would be better to be concerned with Tartars than these little destructive animals: one might say that fire follows their tract." — See *Parkhurst's Lexicon* on 4.

<sup>347</sup> The original word , *shikmotham*, does not properly signify *the fig-tree*, but the *sycamore*, a tree which grows in Palestine, Arabia, and Egypt. It is different from the English sycamore, which is a species of maple. It bears fruit resembling the fig, whilst its leaves are like those of the mulberry-tree; whence its name, συκος, (*sycos*.) a fig-tree, and, μωρος, (*mosos*.) a mulberry-tree. The sycamore was highly valued by the ancient Egyptians. It furnished them with wood for various purposes; it afforded a grateful shade by its wide-spreading branches; and the figs which it produced, it is not improbable, formed a principal part of the food of the common people. "Norden tells us the people for the greater part live upon these figs; thinking themselves well regaled when they have a piece of bread, a couple of sycamore-figs, and a pitcher filled with water from the Nile." — *Harmer's Observations*, volume 4, pages 4, 5. From this it is easy to conceive how severe and distressing the loss must have been which the Egyptians sustained "when their vines were destroyed with hail, and their sycamore-trees with frost or hailstones."

<sup>348</sup> " , *ba-chana-mal*, in frost A noun of four letters prefixed with ; is read here only in Scripture. And what it may be is unknown. *Severe frost*, according to some; *a kind of hail*, according to others." — *Bythner*

<sup>349</sup> The original word , *chayatham*, here rendered *their cattle*, is translated in our English Bible *their life* But in all the ancient versions it is *their cattle* The reference is to the plague which destroyed all the first-born in the land of Egypt. The first-born both of cattle, and of the Egyptians themselves, were involved in one common destruction. Exodus 12:29

<sup>350</sup> "Ar. reads, , 'the first-fruits of their children.' See Exodus 12:29." — *Dimock*

necessary for us to stay long on these things, since the narrative of Moses gives a more distinct and fuller account of what is here briefly stated. Only I would have my readers to remember that, although God often punished the sins of the heathen by sending upon them hail and other calamities, yet all the plagues which at that time were inflicted upon the Egyptians were of an extraordinary character, and such as were previously unheard-of. A variety of words is therefore employed to enhance these memorable instances of the vengeance of God, as that *he sent upon them the fierceness of his wrath, fury, anger, and affliction*. This accumulation of words is intended to awaken minds which are asleep to a discovery of so many miracles, of which both the number and the excellence might be perceived even by the blind themselves.

In the last place, it is added that God executed these judgments *by angels*. Although God has, according as it has pleased him, established certain laws, both in heaven and on earth, and governs the whole order of nature in such a manner as that each creature has assigned to it its own peculiar office; yet whenever it seems good to him he makes use of the ministration of angels for executing his commands, not by ordinary or natural means, but by his secret power, which to us is incomprehensible. Some think that devils are here spoken of, because the epithet *evil* or *hurtful* is applied to *angel*.<sup>351</sup> This opinion I do not reject; but the ground upon which they rest it has little solidity. They say that as God dispenses his benefits to us by the ministry of elect angels, so he also executes his wrath by the agency of reprobate angels, as if they were his executioners. This I admit is partly true; but I deny that this distinction is always observed. Many passages of Scripture can be quoted to the contrary. When the army of the Assyrians laid siege to the holy city Jerusalem, who was it that made such havoc among them as compelled them to raise the siege, but the angel who was appointed at that time for the defense of the Church? (2 Kings 19:35.) In like manner, the angel who slew the first-born in Egypt (Exodus 11:5) was not only a minister and an executor of the wrath of God against the Egyptians, but also the agent employed for preserving the Israelites. On the other hand, although the kings of whom Daniel speaks were avaricious and cruel, or rather robbers, and turned all things upside down, yet the Prophet declares, (chapter 20:13,) that holy angels were appointed to take charge of them. It is probable that the Egyptians were given over and subjected to reprobate angels, as they deserved; but we may simply consider the angels here spoken of as termed *evil*, on account of the work in which they were employed, — because they inflicted upon the enemies of the people of God terrible plagues to repress their tyranny and cruelty. In this way, both the heavenly and elect angels, and the fallen angels, are justly accounted the ministers or executors of calamity; but they are to be regarded as such in different senses. The former yield a prompt and willing obedience to God; but the latter, as they are always eagerly intent upon doing mischief, and would, if they could, turn the whole world upside down, are fit instruments for inflicting calamities upon men.

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<sup>351</sup> Aben Ezra supposes *malachey raim*, to be Moses and Aaron, as *messengers of evil* to Pharaoh, who are so called because they previously warned him, and denounced the judgments of God against him, just as the Prophet Abijah makes use of a similar expression when the wife of Jeroboam came to him to inquire concerning her son: "I am a messenger to thee of hard things," 1 Kings 14:6. Fry also reads "messengers of evil," and has the following note: "Such is the literal meaning and exact rendering of *malachey raim*, and not *evil angels*, which would be regularly *malachey raim*. By these *messengers of evil*, I make no doubt, no more is meant than Moses and Aaron, who were charged with denunciations of wrath to Pharaoh, previously to the infliction of all the several plagues." Archbishop Secker, however, observes, that although *malachey raim* would be the proper expression for *evil angels*, yet the plural of *malachey raim* is sometimes written defectively *malachey raim*. The LXX. has, ἀποστολῶν δι' ἀγγελῶν πονηρῶν, "a message by evil angels."

**50.** *He made a way to his anger.* <sup>352</sup> To take away all excuse from this ungrateful people, whom the most evident and striking proofs of the goodness of God which were presented before their eyes could not keep in their obedience to him, it is here again repeated that the wrath of God overflowed Egypt like an impetuous torrent. The miracle adverted to is the last which was there wrought, when God, by the powerful hand of his angel, slew, in one night, all the first-born of Egypt. According to a common and familiar mode of speaking in the Hebrew language, the first-born are called *the beginning*, or *the first-fruits of strength*. Although the old advance to death as they decline in years, yet as they are in a manner renewed in their offspring, and thus may be said to recover their decayed strength, the term *strength* is applied to their children. And the first-born are called *the beginning* or *the first-fruits* of this strength, as I have explained more at large on Genesis 49:3. The houses of Egypt are called *the tents of Ham*, because Misraim, who gave the name to the country, was the son of Ham, Genesis 10:6. Farther, there is here celebrated the free love of God towards the posterity of Shem, as manifested in his preferring them to all the children of Ham, although they were possessed of no intrinsic excellence which might render them worthy of such a distinction.

### Psalm 78:52-58

**52.** And he made his people to go forth like sheep, and led them in the wilderness like a flock.  
**53.** And he conducted them in safety, and they were not afraid: and the sea covered their enemies.  
**54.** And he brought them to his holy border, [literally to the border of his holiness,] this mountain,  
<sup>353</sup> which his right hand acquired. <sup>354</sup> **55.** He expelled the heathen from before them; and made them to fall into their part of the inheritance; <sup>355</sup> and made the children of Israel to dwell in their tents.  
**56.** And they tempted and provoked the Most High God, and kept not his testimonies. **57.** And they turned back and dealt treacherously, like their fathers: they turned back, like a deceitful bow.  
<sup>356</sup> **58.** And they provoked him to anger with their high places; and moved him to anger with their graven images.

<sup>352</sup> “*He levelled a path to his anger* [the word for *levelled*] signifies to direct by a line or level; and when applied to a way, is understood to denote that the way is made straight and smooth, so as to leave no impediment to the passenger. See Poole’s Synopsis and Le Clerc. The sense will be much the same whether we thus interpret the phrase, or suppose the anger of God to have taken its direction, παρά σάθμην, in a straight line, and by a level; that is, in the shortest way, without delay or deviation.” — *Merrick’s Annotations*

<sup>353</sup> “This mountain, *i.e.*, Zion; which the Psalmist might point to with his finger.” — *Dimock*.

<sup>354</sup> “Ou, possedee.” — *Fr. marg.* “Or, possessed.”

<sup>355</sup> “Perhaps for , we should read , ‘and he made them fall *in the lot* of their inheritance.’ For it has been by some learned men conjectured, that the land of Canaan was originally the allotment of Heber and his descendants, and that the Canaanites had obtained it by *force and violence*; for which reason amongst others, they were expelled from it, and the Hebrews reinstated. See Genesis 11:15; 13:15; 1 Chronicles 1:24-27; and Bryant’s Obs. But see Psalm 105:11, 12, 44, and Psalm 111:7.” — *Dimock*

<sup>356</sup> “ , *like a deceitful bow* This comparison does not seem to convey a suitable idea either here or Hosea 7:16. Might we then venture to read in both places ‘*like a deceitful woman?*’ backsliding Israel being often represented under the character of an adulteress. See Ezekiel 16:32. And the last line of the next verse strongly countenances this reading: ‘and they made him jealous *with their images.*’ See Exodus 20:5.” — *Dimock* There is, however, no necessity for this conjectural emendation. The image employed is natural enough. “The Eastern bow,” says Dr Adam Clarke, “which, when at rest, is in the form of a , must be *recurved*, or *turned the contrary way*, in order to be what is called *bent* and *strung* If a person who is unskilful or weak attempt to *recurve* and string one of these bows, if he take not great heed, it will spring back and regain its quiescent position, and perhaps break his arm. And sometimes I have known it, when bent, to *start aside* — regain its quiescent position — to my no small danger; and, in one or two cases, to my injury. This image is frequently used in the Sacred Writings; but no person has understood

**52.** *And he made his people to go forth like sheep.* The Psalmist again celebrates God's fatherly love towards the chosen people, whom, as we have elsewhere remarked, he compares to a flock of sheep. They had no wisdom or power of their own to preserve and defend themselves; but God graciously condescended to perform towards them the office of a shepherd. It is a singular token of the love which he bore towards them, that he did not disdain to humble himself so far as to feed them as his own sheep. What could a multitude who had never been trained up to the art of war do against powerful and warlike enemies? So far from having learned the art of war, the people, as is well known, had been employed, when in Egypt, in mean and servile occupations, as if they had been condemned to toil under the earth in mines or in quarries.

**53.** *And he conducted them in safety, and they were not afraid.* This does not imply that they relied on God confidently, and with tranquil minds, but that, having God for their guide and the guardian of their welfare, they had no just cause to be afraid. When at any time they were thrown into consternation, this was owing to their own unbelief. From this cause proceeded these murmuring questions to which they gave utterance, when Pharaoh pursued them, upon their leaving Egypt, and when they were "sore afraid:" "Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness," (Exodus 14:11.) This security, then, is not to be referred to the feeling of this in the minds of the people, but to the protection of God, by which it came to pass that, their enemies having been drowned in the Red Sea, they enjoyed quiet and repose in the wilderness. Other benefits which God had bestowed upon them are here recited, and at the same time other transgressions with which they had been chargeable. This shows the more clearly their deep ingratitude. After having obtained possession of the inheritance which was promised them, as if they had been under no obligations to God, their hearts were always rebellious and untractable. The accomplishment, and, as it were, the concluding act of their deliverance, was the putting them in possession of the land of Canaan, from entering which they had precluded themselves, had not God determined, notwithstanding their wickedness, to complete, in all respects, the work which he had commenced. The land itself is called *the borders of God's sanctuary*, (verse 54,) because God, in assigning it to his people, had also consecrated it to himself. This, it is manifest, exhibits in a more heinous and aggravated light the iniquity of the people, who brought into that land the same pollutions with which it had been anciently defiled. What madness was it for the people of Israel, who knew that the old inhabitants of the country had been driven from it on account of their abominations, to strive to surpass them in all kinds of wickedness? as if they had been resolved to do all they could to bring down upon their own heads that divine vengeance which they had seen executed upon others. The words *this mountain* are improperly explained by some as applying to the whole country of Judea; for although it was a mountainous country, there were in it plain and level grounds of large extent, both as to breadth and length. I have, therefore, no doubt, that by way of amplification the Psalmist makes honorable mention of mount Zion, where God had chosen a habitation for himself, and his chief seat. I indeed allow, that under this expression, by the figure synecdoche, a part is put for the

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it, not being acquainted with the Eastern *recurved bow*, which must be bent the contrary way, in order to be proper for use These Israelites, when brought out of their natural bent, soon recoiled, and relapsed into their former state."

whole; only I would have my readers to understand, that this place is expressly named, because from it, as from a source or fountain, flowed the holiness of the whole land. It is asserted that God, by his right hand, possessed or acquired this mountain; for the Hebrew verb , *kanah*, may be understood in either of these senses: and this assertion is made, that the Israelites might not be lifted up with pride, as if they had achieved the conquest of the land, or had obtained the peaceable possession of it by their own power. As is stated in Psalm 44:3,

“They got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them, but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favor unto them.” (Psalm 44:3)

**55.** *He expelled the heathen from before them; and made them to fall into their part of the inheritance.* These words are an explanation of the concluding sentence of the preceding verse: they describe the manner in which the land of Canaan was acquired, plainly intimating that the Israelites were not such a warlike race, nor those heathen nations so cowardly, as to render it an easy matter for the former to vanquish the latter, and that it would have been impossible for the former to have expelled the latter from the country, had they not been led on to victory under the conduct of God, and been aided by his power. Besides, it would have been unlawful for them to have taken possession of the country, had it not been the will of God that the first inhabitants should be deprived of it, and that strangers should be established in it in their room.

**56.** *And they tempted and provoked the Most High God.* Here they are upbraided for having, notwithstanding the many tokens of the divine favor by which they were distinguished, persevered in acting perfidiously: yea, even although God from time to time conferred upon them new benefits, to recover them to their allegiance to him, they, notwithstanding, by their rebellion, shook off his yoke. With respect to the word *tempt*, we have already explained its import. But it is added in general, that *they provoked God, because they had not kept his covenant* By this last clause, their open and gross rebellion is the more completely demonstrated; for, although they had been plainly taught their duty, they nevertheless refused to submit to the authority of God. The law is called *testimonies* or *agreements*,<sup>357</sup> because, as men enter into contracts upon certain conditions, so God, by his covenant, entered into a contract with this people, and bound them to himself. In speaking of them in this manner, there is pronounced upon them no light censure; but when they are charged in the next verse with apostasy and perfidiousness, that fills up the measure of their guilt. God had adopted them to be his people: they, on the other hand, despising his favor, voluntarily renounce it. He had gathered them together under his wings; and they, by their waywardness, scatter themselves in all directions. He had promised to be a father to them; and they refuse to be his children. He had shown them the way of salvation; and they, by going astray, willingly precipitate themselves into destruction. The prophet, therefore, concludes, that in every age they showed themselves to be an impious and wicked people. It is again to be noticed, that the fault which is most severely condemned in them is, that they too much resembled their fathers. This is particularly mentioned, to prevent any man from deceiving himself by supposing, that in indiscriminately imitating his ancestors he is doing right, and that he may not think of making use of their example as an argument for defending his own conduct. The instability of the people is next expressed by a very apposite figure, which Hosea also employs in Hosea 7:16. As archers are deceived when they have a bow which is too

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<sup>357</sup> “Ou, Convenances.” — *Fr.*

weak, or ill bent, or crooked and flexible, so it is stated, that this people *turned back*, and slipped away by their deceitful and tortuous craftiness, that they might not be governed by the hand of God.

**58.** *And they provoked him to anger with their high places.* We have here adduced the species of defection by which the Israelites afforded incontestable evidence that they refused to be faithful to God, and to yield allegiance to him. They had been sufficiently, and more than sufficiently warned, that the service of God would be perverted and contaminated, unless they were regulated in every part of it by the Divine Word; and now, disregarding his whole law, they recklessly follow their own inventions. And the fruits which uniformly proceed from the contempt of the law are, that men who choose rather to follow their own understanding than to submit to the authority of God, become wedded to gross superstitions. The Psalmist complains that the service of God was corrupted by them in two ways; in the first place, by their defacing the glory of God, in setting up for themselves idols and graven images; and, secondly, by their inventing strange and forbidden ceremonies to appease the anger of God.

### Psalm 78:59-66

**59.** God heard it, and was wroth, and exceedingly abhorred Israel. **60.** And he forsook the habitation of Shiloh,<sup>358</sup> the tabernacle where he dwelt among men. **61.** And he delivered his strength into captivity, and his beauty into the hand of the enemy. **62.** And he shut up his people to the sword, and was wroth with his own inheritance. **63.** The fire devoured their chosen;<sup>359</sup> and their virgins were not applauded.<sup>360</sup> **64.** Their priests fell by the sword; and their widows made no lamentation. **65.** But the Lord awoke as one asleep, as a mighty man that crieth out by reason of wine. **66.** And he smote his enemies behind; he put upon them everlasting disgrace.

**59** *God heard it, and was wroth.* The prophet again shows that God, when he found that no good resulted from his long-suffering, which the people abused, yea, even treated with mockery, and perverted as an encouragement to greater excess in sinning, at length proceeded to inflict severe punishments upon them. The metaphor, which he borrows from earthly judges, is frequently to be met with in the Scriptures. When God is said *to hear*, it is not meant that it is necessary for him to make inquisition, but it is intended to teach us that he does not rush forth inconsiderately to execute his judgments, and thus to prevent any from supposing that he ever acts precipitately. The amount of what is stated is, that the people continued so pertinaciously in their wickedness, that at length the cry of it ascended to heaven; and the very weight of the punishment demonstrated the aggravated nature of the offense.

<sup>358</sup> Shiloh was a city in the tribe of Ephraim, (the son of Joseph,) where the tabernacle and the ark had for a long time their fixed abode; (see Joshua 18:1,) but from whence the ark was taken by the Philistines, in the time of Eli the priest.

<sup>359</sup> “C’est, l’elite et la fleur du peuple.” — *Fr. marg.* “That is, the choice and flower of the people.”

<sup>360</sup> Fry renders this verse: —

“A fire consumed their young men,  
And their virgins had no nuptial song.”

“ , (pro ) *laudatae, celebratae sunt*, scil. epithalamiis.” — *Simonis* “*Were not praised, i e., remained unmarried; as marriage songs were sung at nuptials.*” — *Bythner*

After it is said that Israel, whom God had loved so much, was become an abomination in his sight, it is added, (verse 60,) that they were bereft of the presence of God, which is the only source of true felicity and comfort under calamities of every kind. God, then, is said *to have abhorred Israel*, when he permitted the ark of the covenant to be carried into another country, as if he intended by this to indicate that he had departed from Judea, and bidden the people farewell. It is indeed very obvious, that God was not fixed to the outward and visible symbol; but as he had given the ark to be a token or sign of the close union which subsisted between him and the Israelites, in suffering it to be carried away, he testified, that he himself had also departed from them. Shiloh having been for a long time the abode of the ark, and the place where it was captured by the Philistines, (1 Samuel 4:11,) it is termed *the habitation* or *dwelling-place of God*. The manner of his residence, in short, is beautifully expressed in the next sentence, where Shiloh is described as his dwelling-place *among men*. God, it is true, fills both heaven and earth; but as we cannot attain to that infinite height to which he is exalted, in descending among us by the exercise of his power and grace, he approaches as near to us as is needful, and as our limited capacity will bear. It is a very emphatic manner of speaking to represent God as so incensed by the continual wickedness of his people, that he was constrained to forsake this place, the only one which he had chosen for himself upon the earth.

**61.** *And he delivered his strength into captivity.* In this verse, the same subject is prosecuted: it is declared, that *the strength* of God, by which the Israelites had been shielded and defended, was at that time *in captivity*. Not that his power could only be exerted in connection with the outward symbol; but instead of opposing their enemies as he had formerly done, it was now his will that the grace by which he had preserved his people should, so to speak, be led captive. This, however, is not to be understood as implying that the Philistines had made God their prisoner. The meaning simply is, that the Israelites were deprived of the protection of God, in consequence of which they fell into the hands of their enemies, even as an army is put to flight when the general is taken prisoner. The ark is also termed *the beauty of God*; because, being in himself invisible, he made it the symbol of his presence, or, as it were, a mirror in which he might be seen. It is a bold, and at first sight, an absurd hyperbole, to say that the strength of God was taken prisoner by the Philistines; but it is expressly used for the purpose of aggravating the wickedness of the people. As he had been accustomed mightily to display the power of his arm in aiding them, the offenses with which he had been provoked must have been of a very heinous character, when he suffered that symbol of his power to be forcibly carried away by a heathen army. We are taught by the prophet Jeremiah, (Jeremiah 7:12,) that what is here related of Shiloh, is addressed as a warning to all those who, flattering themselves upon false grounds, that they enjoy the presence of God, are lifted up with vain confidence: “But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel.” If, therefore, when God approaches us familiarly, we do not sincerely receive him with that reverence which becomes us, we have ground to fear that what happened to the people of Shiloh will happen also to us. So much the more disgusting, then, is the boasting of the Pope and his adherents, who support the claims of Rome as the special dwelling-place of God, from the fact, that the Church in former times flourished in that city. It is to be remembered, — what they seem to forget, — that Christ, who is the true temple of the Godhead, was born in Bethlehem, and brought up in Nazareth, and that he dwelt and preached in Capernaum and Jerusalem; and yet the miserable desolation of all these cities affords a dreadful testimony of the wrath of God.



**62.** *And he shut up his people to the sword.* Other parts of the calamity which befell Israel in the time of the high priest Eli are here mentioned. God, in permitting the ark to be carried away, showed that he had withdrawn his favor from them. This was also demonstrated from the fact, that all the flower of the people — those who were in the prime and blush of manhood — were consumed by the wrath of God: which is expressed by *the fire devouring them*. But this language is metaphorical, as is evident from the history of the event referred to, which informs us, that those that perished who were of the chosen of Israel, to the number of thirty thousand men, fell by the sword of the enemy, and not by fire, (1 Samuel 4:10.) This figure points out the suddenness of the dreadful calamity. It is as if it had been said, They were destroyed in a moment, even as fire quickly consumes chaff and the dry leaves of trees.<sup>361</sup>

The great extent of this slaughter is heightened by another figure, which is, that for want of men, the maidens continued unmarried. This is the meaning of the clause, *Their virgins were not applauded*; the reference being to the nuptial songs which were wont to be sung at marriages in praise of the bride. To aggravate still more the unwonted and appalling nature of the calamity, it is added, that even *the priests*, whom God had taken under his special protection, perished indiscriminately with others. When it is said, that *the widows made no lamentation*, I would explain it as denoting, either that they themselves died first for sorrow, so that they had no opportunity of mourning for others, or else, that when led captive by their enemies, they were prohibited to mourn. By all these expressions, the object is to show, in a few words, that all kinds of calamities were heaped upon them.<sup>362</sup>

**65.** *But the Lord awoke as one asleep.* Some understand this as spoken of the Israelites, implying that the Lord awoke against them; and others, as spoken of their enemies. If the first sense is adopted, it need not excite our surprise, that the Israelites are termed, in the 66th verse, *the enemies of God*, even as they are so designated in Isaiah 1:24,

“Therefore, saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah! I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies.” (Isaiah 1:24)

And thus the meaning will be, that the Israelites paid dearly for abusing the patience of God, by taking encouragement from it to indulge to greater excess in the commission of sin; for awaking suddenly, he rushed upon them with so much the greater fury. But as we find the prophets drawing their doctrine from Moses, and also framing their language according to his as a standard, the opinion of those who understand this and the following verse, as referring to the Philistines, is no less probable. The prophet here appears to have borrowed this order, from the song of Moses, (Deuteronomy 32:27,) where God declares, that while he punished his own people, he, at the same time, did not forget to repress their enemies. Since it is a common proverb, that the issue of wars is uncertain, if, after the enemies of the chosen tribes had obtained the victory, no change had happened to them, it would not have been so manifest, that what befell his own people was a punishment inflicted upon them by God. But when God, after having afflicted and humbled the Israelites, made his judgments to fall on their conquerors, without the instrumentality of man, beyond all human expectation, and contrary to what happens in the ordinary course of events; —

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<sup>361</sup> “Que c’en a este fait en un moment, ainsi que le feu a incontinent consume de la paille ou des fueilles d’arbres bieu seiches.”  
— *Fr.*

<sup>362</sup> That is, the order of enumerating first the judgments inflicted by God upon his own people, and then those inflicted upon their enemies.

from this it is the more plainly manifest, that when the Israelites were laid in the dust, it was the work of God, who intended thus to punish them. The prophet, however, at the same time, gives us to understand, that God was constrained, as it were, by necessity, to punish them with greater severity; because, in afterwards inflicting his judgments upon the Philistines, he gave abundant evidence of his regard to his covenant, which the Israelites might be very apt to think he had quite forgotten. Although he had, so to speak, taken the side of the Philistines for a time, it was not his intention utterly to withdraw his love from the children of Abraham, lest the truth of his promise should become void.

The figure of a drunken man may seem somewhat harsh; but the propriety of using it will appear, when we consider that it is employed in accommodation to the stupidity of the people. Had they been of a pure and clear understanding, <sup>363</sup> God would not have thus transformed himself, and assumed a character foreign to his own. When he, therefore, compares himself to a drunken man, it was the drunkenness of the people; that is to say, their insensibility that constrained him to speak thus: which was so much the greater shame to them. With respect to God, the metaphor derogates nothing from his glory. If he does not immediately remedy our calamities, we are ready to think that he is sunk into a profound sleep. But how can God, it may be said, be thus asleep, when he is superior in strength to all the giants, and yet they can easily watch for a long time, and are satisfied with little sleep? I answer, when he exercises forbearance, and does not promptly execute his judgments, the interpretation which ignorant people put upon his conduct is, that he loiters in this manner like a man who is stupified, and knows not how to proceed. <sup>364</sup> The prophet, on the contrary, declares, that this sudden awaking of God will be more alarming and terrible than if he had at the first lifted up his hand to execute judgment; and that it will be as if a giant, drunken with wine, should start up suddenly out of his sleep, while as yet he had not slept off his surfeit. Many restrict the statement in the 66th verse, concerning God's *smiting his enemies behind*, to the plague which he sent upon the Philistines, recorded in 1 Samuel 5:12. The phrase, *everlasting disgrace*, agrees very well with this interpretation; for it was a shameful disease to be afflicted with haemorrhoids in their hinder parts. But as the words, *They were smitten behind*, admit of a more simple sense, I leave the matter undecided.

## Psalm 78:67-72

**67.** And he rejected the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim: **68.** But he chose the tribe of Judah, the mountain of Zion, which he loved: <sup>365</sup> **69.** And built his sanctuary like

<sup>363</sup> "S'il eust eu un entendement rassis et bien dispose a escouter." — *Fr.* "Had they been possessed of a clear understanding, and disposed to listen."

<sup>364</sup> "Les gens stupides prenent cela comme s'il s'arrestoit ainsi qu'un homme estonne, qui ne scait par ou commencer." — *Fr.*

<sup>365</sup> "The epocha to which the Psalmist brings down the Israelitish history was the exaltation of David, and the establishment of the royal and ecclesiastical pre-eminence of Judah and Jerusalem. Previous to that period, Ephraim was in some sort the leading tribe; and the first erection of the tabernacle in Shiloh, whither the tribes went up, gave to the sons of Joseph a kind of metropolitan dignity in Israel. Hence, this period is considered as the time of their precedency in the nation. But the children of Ephraim, or Israel, under their precedency, had been faithless to their trust, and in the day of trial, had not answered to their promise and professions. And to this was owing the low estate, in which the administrations of Samuel and David found the Church and people of Israel." — *Fry.*

high places, and like the earth which he has established for ever. **70.** And he chose David his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds: **71.** He took him froth following the suckling ewes, to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance: **72.** And he fed them in the uprightness of his heart, and guided them by the prudence of his hands.

**67.** *And he rejected the tabernacle of Joseph.* Those who suppose that the word *enemies*, in the 66th verse, applies to the Israelites, connect these verses with the preceding, and suppose the meaning to be, that the wound which God had inflicted upon them was incurable. But, preferring the other opinion, which regards the Philistines as spoken of, and the scope to be, that God, in punishing them so severely, evidently showed that the covenant which he had made with his people was not disannulled, since he had avenged himself in such an awful manner upon their enemies, the explanation which I would rather give is, that this is added by way of correction, as if it had been said, That God was not yet fully reconciled towards his people who had wickedly revolted from him, and that, as an evidence of this, there remained among them some traces of the punishment with which he had visited them. The meaning of the text, therefore, is, that when the ark was taken by the Philistines, God was, so to speak, asleep, having been made drunk by the sins of his people, so that he could no longer keep watch for their defense as he had been accustomed to do; and yet, that he did not continue long sunk in sleep, but that, whenever he saw the ungodly Philistines treating with mockery the glory of his majesty, this heinous insult awoke and provoked him, just as if a giant, having well supped, had awoke from his first sleep before he had recovered from the exciting effects of his wine; and that, at the same time, his anger had not been so provoked against this heathen and uncircumcised nation as to prevent him from exhibiting some signs of the chastisement which he had inflicted upon the wicked and ungrateful Israelites even to the end. The rejection spoken of amounts to this, that when God permitted his ark to be carried away to another place, the Israelites were thereby deprived of the honor with which, by special privilege, they had been previously distinguished.

There are two principal points which should here be particularly attended to; in the first place, when the Philistines were smitten with unseemly ulcers, the plainest evidence was afforded that when the Israelites were conquered by them, this happened solely because God willed it to be so. He did not recover new strength, or gather together a new army for the purpose of invading, some short time after, the Philistines who had been victorious, nor did he have recourse, in doing this, to foreign aid. The other point is, that although God stretched forth his hand against the Philistines, to show that he had still some remembrance of his covenant, and some care of the people whom he had chosen, yet in restoring the Israelites in some measure to their former state, he made the rejection of Shiloh a perpetual monument of his wrath. He, therefore, rejected the tribe of Ephraim; <sup>366</sup> not that he cast them off for ever, or completely severed them from the rest of the body of the Church, but he would not have the ark of his covenant to reside any longer within the boundaries of that tribe. To the tribe of Ephraim is here opposed the tribe of Judah, in which God afterwards chose for himself a dwelling-place.

Thus the prophet proceeds to show, that when the ark of the covenant had a resting-place assigned to it on mount Zion, the people were in a manner renewed; and this symbol of reconciliation

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<sup>366</sup> Shiloh, as formerly observed, was a city in the tribe of Ephraim, and it was rejected as the resting-place of the ark.

being restored to them, they were recovered to the favor of God from which they had fallen. As God had, so to speak, been banished from the kingdom, and his strength led into captivity through the sins of the Israelites, they had need to be taught, by this memorial, that God had been so highly displeased with their wickedness, that he could not bear to look upon the place in which he had formerly dwelt. After this separation, although to teach the people to be more on their guard in time to come, there was not a full and perfect restitution, yet God again chose a fixed residence for his ark, which was a manifestation of wonderful goodness and mercy on his part. The ark, after its return, was carried from one place to another, as to Gath, Ekron, and other places, until mount Zion was pointed out by an oracle as its fixed abode; but this intervening period is not taken notice of by the prophet, because his design went no farther than to impress upon the memory, both the example of the punishment, and the grace of God, which was greater than any could have ventured to hope for.<sup>367</sup> That which is often repeated by Moses should also be remembered:

“But unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come,” etc., (Deuteronomy 12:5.)

Shiloh having acquired this renown, because the ark had dwelt there for a long time, when the ark was carried away into the country of the enemies of Israel, the minds of men were strangely perplexed, until they knew the place which God had chosen for its future residence. The ten tribes were not at that time rejected, and they had an equal interest in the kingdom and the priesthood with the tribe of Judah; but in process of time their own rebellion cut them off. This is the reason why the prophet says, in scorn, that the tribe of Ephraim was rejected, and that the tribe of Joseph, from whom it sprung, was not chosen.

**68.** *But he chose the tribe of Judah.* The meaning is, that God preferred the tribe of Judah to all the rest of the people, and chose from it a king, whom he might set over all the Israelites as well as the Jews. And he chose *the mountain of Zion*, appointing a certain spot upon it to be the seat of his sanctuary. That the cause of this choice might not be sought any where else but in God, it is particularly stated that the preferring of mount Zion to all other places, and the enriching of it in such a distinguished manner, proceeded entirely from the free and unmerited love of God. The relative *which* is here put instead of the causal adverb *for*; the meaning being, that the sanctuary of God was established there, not for any worthiness of the place, but solely because it was the good pleasure of God. It was proper that this second restitution of the people should be no less free than their first adoption was, when God made his covenant with Abraham, or when he delivered them from the land of Egypt. God’s *love* to the place had a respect to men. From this it follows, that the Church has been gathered together from the beginning, and in all ages, by the pure grace and goodness of God; for never have men been found to possess any intrinsic meritorious claims to his regard, and the Church is too precious to be left to depend upon the power of men.

**69.** *And built his sanctuary like high places.*<sup>368</sup> In this verse, what is intimated is simply this, that Mount Zion was singularly beautified; which, however, ought to be referred to the heavenly pattern. It was not the will of God that the minds of his people should be entirely engrossed with the magnificence of the building, or with the pomp of outward ceremonies; but that they should be

<sup>367</sup> “La grace de Dieu plus grande qu’on n’eust ose esperer.” — *Fr.*

<sup>368</sup> In our English Bible it is, “And he built his sanctuary like high palaces.” On which Archbishop Secker has the following note: — “That God *built his tabernacle like high palaces*, is not a strong expression. *On high*, which Hare adopts, is better. And perhaps changing *high* into *high*, would suffice for this sense. But the old versions have *high*, and yet in the latter part of the verse they have *high*, for *high*. It is a remarkable anticipation to mention the temple, which Solomon built, before the mention of David.”

elevated to Christ, in whom the truth of the figures of the former economy was exhibited. It is, therefore affirmed, that *the sanctuary was built like high places*; that is to say, it was conspicuous among all the high mountains: even as Isaiah (Isaiah 2:2,) and Micah, (Micah 4:1,) prophesying of the building of the new and spiritual temple, declare that it “shall be established in the tops of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills.” And it is well known that fortresses were in those days erected upon high places. Zion is next compared to the entire mass of the globe: *He hath built his sanctuary like the earth,* <sup>369</sup> *which he has established for ever.* Some regions of the globe are visited by earthquakes, or perish by the opening of the earth, or are agitated by some violent commotion, or undergo some alteration; but the body of the earth itself continues always stable and unchanged, because it rests upon deep foundations. It is, therefore, here taught that the building spoken of was not temporary, like the sumptuous palaces of kings, which fall into ruins during the lapse of time, or are in danger of being destroyed by other means; but that it was founded to stand entire, even to the end of the world. If it is objected that the temple was destroyed by the Chaldeans and Assyrians, the answer is obvious, That the stability celebrated consists in Christ alone; for, if the ancient sanctuary, which was only a figure, is considered merely in itself, without any regard to that which it typified, it will be only an empty shadow. But as God intended it to be a pledge to show that Christ was to come, perpetuity is justly attributed to it. In like manner it is said, in another place, (Psalm 87:1,) “His foundation is in the holy mountains;” and in Isaiah, (Isaiah 14:32,) “The Lord hath founded Zion;” and again, in Psalm 74:2, God is said “to dwell in mount Zion,” so that it should never be moved.

**70.** *And he chose David his servant.* After having made mention of the temple, the prophet now proceeds to speak of the kingdom; for these two things were the chief signs of God’s choice of his ancient people, and of his favor towards them; and Christ also hath appeared as our king and priest to bring a full and perfect salvation to us. He proves that David was made king by God, who elevated him from the sheepfold, and from the keeping of cattle, to the royal throne. It serves in no small degree to magnify the grace of God, that a peasant was taken from his mean shepherd’s cot, and exalted to the dignity of a king. Nor is this grace limited to the person of David. We are taught that whatever worth there was in the children of Abraham, flowed from the fountain of God’s mercy. The whole glory and felicity of the people consisted in the kingdom and priesthood; and both these are attributed to the pure grace and good pleasure of God. And it was requisite that the commencement of the kingdom of Christ should be lowly and contemptible, that it might correspond with its type, and that God might clearly show that he did not make use of external aids in order to accomplish our salvation.

**71.** *He took him from following the suckling ewes, etc.* The grace of God is farther commended from the circumstance, that David, who was a keeper of sheep, was made the shepherd of the chosen people and heritage of God. There is an allusion to David’s original condition; but the Spirit of God, at the same time, shows us the difference between good and lawful kings, and tyrants, robbers, and insatiable extortioners, by telling us that whoever would aspire to the character of the former must be like shepherds.

It is afterwards added, (verse 72,) that David had faithfully performed the duties of the trust committed to him. By this the prophet indirectly rebukes the ingratitude and perverseness of the

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<sup>369</sup> “*Like the earth*; the simile is intended to point out the fixedness of the *temple*, in opposition to the frequent *different* stations in which the tabernacle had been placed.” — *Warner*.

people, who not only overturned the holy and inviolable order which God had established, but who had also, in shaking off his salutary yoke, thrown themselves into a state of miserable dispersion. What follows concerning *the prudence of David's hands* seems to be an improper form of expression. But it is intended forcibly to express, that he not only was successful in what he had undertaken, but that he was governed by the Spirit of God, which prevented him from putting his hand at random to any work which might come in his way, and led him prudently and skilfully to do that to which faith and duty called him; and thus, in the success of his undertakings, his wisdom appears more conspicuous than his good fortune.

## PSALM 79

This is a complaint and lamentation of the Church when severely afflicted; in which, while the faithful bewail their miserable and, in one sense, undeserved calamities, and accuse their enemies of cruelty, they acknowledge that, in another sense, they have been justly chastised, and humbly betake themselves to the divine mercy. Their confidence of obtaining this, they rest chiefly upon the fact, that they saw God's dishonor conjoined with their calamities, inasmuch as the ungodly, in oppressing the Church, blasphemed his sacred name.

### *A Psalm of Asaph.*

This psalm, like others, contains internal evidence that it was composed long after the death of David. Some who ascribe it to him allege, in support of this opinion, that the afflictions of the Church have been here predicted by the spirit of prophecy, to encourage the faithful in bearing the cross when these afflictions should arrive. But there does not appear to be any ground for such a supposition. It is not usual with the prophets thus to speak historically in their prophecies. Whoever judiciously reflects upon the scope of the poem will easily perceive that it was composed either when the Assyrians, after having burnt the temple, and destroyed the city, dragged the people into captivity, or when the temple was defiled by Antiochus, after he had slaughtered a vast number of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Its subject agrees very well with either of these periods. Let us then take it as an admitted point, that this complaint was dictated to the people of God at a time when the Church was subjected to oppression, and when matters were reduced to the most hopeless condition. How cruelly the Assyrians conducted themselves is well known. And under the tyranny of Antiochus, if a man dared simply to open his mouth in defense of the pure worship of God, he did it at the risk of immediately forfeiting his life.

### **Psalm 79:1-4**

**1.** O God! the heathen [or the nations] have come into thy inheritance; they have defiled the temple of thy holiness; they have laid Jerusalem in heaps. **2.** They have given the dead bodies of thy servants for food to the fowls of the heaven; the flesh of thy meek ones to the beasts of the earth. **3.** They have shed their blood like water, around Jerusalem: and there was none to bury them. **4.** We have been a reproach to our neighbors; a scorn and a derision to them that are around us.

**1.** *O God! the heathen have come into thy inheritance.* Here the prophet, in the person of the faithful, complains that the temple was defiled, and the city destroyed. In the second and third verses, he complains that the saints were murdered indiscriminately, and that their dead bodies were cast forth upon the face of the earth, and deprived of the honor of burial. Almost every word expresses the cruelty of these enemies of the Church. When it is considered that God had chosen the land of Judea to be a possession to his own people, it seemed inconsistent with this choice to abandon it to the heathen nations, that they might ignominiously trample it under foot, and lay it waste at their pleasure. The prophet, therefore, complains that when the heathen *came into the heritage of God*, the order of nature was, as it were, inverted. The destruction of the temple, of which he speaks in the second clause, was still less to be endured; for thus the service of God on earth was extinguished, and religion destroyed. He adds, that *Jerusalem*, which was the royal seat

of God, *was reduced to heaps*. By these words is denoted a hideous overthrow. The profanation of the temple, and the destruction of the holy city, involving, as they did, heaven-daring impiety, which ought justly to have provoked the wrath of God against these enemies — the prophet begins with them, and then comes to speak of the slaughter of the saints. The atrocious cruelty of these persecutions is pointed out from the circumstance that they not only put to death the servants of God, but also exposed their dead bodies to the beasts of the field, and to birds of prey, to be devoured, instead of burying them. Men have always had such a sacred regard to the burial of the dead, as to shrink from depriving even their enemies of the honor of sepulture.<sup>370</sup> Whence it follows, that those who take a barbarous delight in seeing the bodies of the dead torn to pieces and devoured by beasts, more resemble these savage and cruel animals than human beings. It is also shown that these persecutors acted more atrociously than enemies ordinarily do, inasmuch as they made no more account of *shedding human blood than of pouring forth water*. From this we learn their insatiable thirst for slaughter. When it is added, *there was none to bury them*, this is to be understood as applying to the brethren and relatives of the slain. The inhabitants of the city were stricken with such terror by the indiscriminate butchery perpetrated by these ruthless assassins upon all who came in their way, that no one dared to go forth. God having intended that, in the burial of men, there should be some testimony to the resurrection at the last day, it was a double indignity for the saints to be despoiled of this right after their death. But it may be asked, Since God often threatens the reprobate with this kind of punishment, why did he suffer his own people to be devoured of beasts? We must remember, what we have stated elsewhere, that the elect, as well as the reprobate, are subjected to the temporal punishments which pertain only to the flesh. The difference between the two cases lies solely in the issue; for God converts that which in itself is a token of his wrath into the means of the salvation of his own children. The same explanation, then, is to be given of their want of burial which is given of their death. The most eminent of the servants of God may be put to a cruel and ignominious death — a punishment which we know is often executed upon murderers, and other despisers of God; but still the death of the saints does not cease to be precious in his sight: and when he has suffered them to be unrighteously persecuted in the flesh, he shows, by taking vengeance on their enemies, how dear they were to him. In like manner, God, to stamp the marks of his wrath on the reprobate, even after their death, deprives them of burial; and, therefore, he threatens a wicked king, “He shall be buried with the burial of all ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem,” (Jeremiah 22:19; see also Jeremiah 36:30.)<sup>371</sup> When he exposes his own children to the like indignity, he may seem for a time to have forsaken them; but he afterwards converts it into the means of furthering their salvation; for their faith, being subjected to this trial, acquires a fresh triumph. When in ancient times the bodies of the dead were anointed, that ceremony was performed for the sake of the living whom they left behind them, to teach them, when they saw the bodies of the dead carefully preserved, to cherish in their hearts the hope of a better life. The faithful, then, by being deprived of burial, suffer no loss, when they rise by faith above these inferior helps, that they may advance with speedy steps to a blessed immortality.

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<sup>370</sup> If this psalm was written on the taking of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, or during the Babylonish captivity, it would appear, from this verse, that when the Chaldeans destroyed Jerusalem, they left the bodies of the slain unburied, to be devoured by beasts and birds of prey.

<sup>371</sup> Similar threatenings are to be found in Isaiah 14:19, 20; Jeremiah 8:2.



**4** *We have been a reproach to our neighbors.* Here another complaint is uttered, to excite the mercy of God. The more proudly the ungodly mock and triumph over us, the more confidently may we expect that our deliverance is near; for God will not bear with their insolence when it breaks forth so audaciously; especially when it redounds to the reproach of his holy name: even as it is said in Isaiah,

“This is the word which the Lord hath spoken concerning him, The virgin, the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed; and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel.”

(Isaiah 37:22, 23)

And assuredly *their neighbors*,<sup>372</sup> who were partly apostates, or the degenerate children of Abraham, and partly the avowed enemies of religion, when they molested and reproached this miserable people, did not refrain from blaspheming God. Let us, therefore, remember that the faithful do not here complain of the derision with which they were treated as individuals, but of that which they saw to be indirectly levelled against God and his law. We shall again meet with a similar complaint in the concluding part of the psalm.

### Psalm 79:5-9

**5.** How long, O Jehovah! wilt thou be wroth for ever? Shall thy jealousy burn like fire? **6.** Pour out thy fury<sup>373</sup> upon the heathen [or the nations] who have not known thee, and on the kingdoms which call not upon thy name. **7.** For they have devoured Jacob, and made desolate his dwelling.<sup>374</sup> **8.** Remember not against us the iniquities of former times: make haste, let thy compassions prevent us; for we are exceedingly afflicted. **9.** Help us, O God of our salvation! for the glory of thy name; and deliver us, and be merciful to our sins, for thy name's sake.

**5** *How long, O Jehovah! wilt thou be wroth for ever?* I have already observed that these two expressions, *how long* and *for ever*, when joined together, denote a lengthened and an uninterrupted continuance of calamities; and that there is no appearance, when looking to the future, of their coming to a termination. We may, therefore, conclude that this complaint was not ended within a month or two after persecution against the Church commenced, but at a time when the hearts of the faithful were almost broken through the weariness produced by prolonged suffering. Here they

<sup>372</sup> Street, instead of “our neighbors,” reads, “those that dwell among us;” and has the following note: — “Those foreigners who sojourn among us; , from , to inhabit or dwell; γειτοσιν ἡμῶν, *our neighbors*, Septuagint. But that rendering does not sufficiently express the distressed and humbled state of Israel, as described in the Hebrew; they were so reduced, that not only neighboring nations, but even those foreigners who sojourned amongst them, had the insolence to deride them, even in their own country.” Dr Adam Clarke explains, *We are become a reproach to our neighbors*, thus: “The Idumeans, Philistines, Phoenicians, Ammonites, and Moabites, all gloried in the subjugation of this people; and their insults to them were mixed with blasphemies against God.”

<sup>373</sup> “C'est, ire.” — *Fr. marg.* “That is, anger.”

<sup>374</sup> This and the preceding verse are almost exactly the same with Jeremiah 10:25. “Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not on thy name: for they have eaten up Jacob, and devoured him, and consumed him; and have made his habitation desolate.” From this, some have thought that Jeremiah, who was one of the prophets of the captivity, was the inspired writer of this psalm.

confess that the great accumulation of calamities with which they are overwhelmed, is to be traced to the wrath of God. Being fully persuaded that the wicked, whatever they may plot, cannot inflict injury, except in so far as God permits them — from this, which they regard as an indubitable principle, they at once conclude, that when he allows such ample scope to their heathen enemies in persecuting them, his anger is greatly provoked. Nor would they, without this persuasion, have looked to God in the hope that he would stretch forth his hand to save them; for it is the work of Him who hath given loose reins to draw in the bridle. Whenever God visits us with the rod, and our own conscience accuses us, it especially becomes us to look to His hand. Here his ancient people do not charge him with being unjustly displeased, but acknowledge the justice of the punishment inflicted upon them. God will always find in his servants just grounds for chastising them. He often, however, in the exercise of his mercy, pardons their sins, and exercises them with the cross for another purpose than to testify his displeasure against their sins, just as it was his will to try the patience of *Job*, and as he vouchsafed to call the martyrs to an honorable warfare. But here the people, of their own accord, summoning themselves before the Divine tribunal, trace the calamities which they endured to their own sins, as the procuring cause. Hence it may, with probability, be conjectured that this psalm was composed during the time of the Babylonish captivity. Under the tyranny of Antiochus Epiphanes, they employed, as we have previously seen, a different form of prayer, saying,

“All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant. Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way,”  
(Psalm 44:17, 18.)

We are not to suppose that, in the passage now quoted, the faithful murmured against God, but they employ this language because they knew that he had another end in view than simply to punish their sins; for, by means of these severe conflicts, he prepared them for the prize of their high calling.

**6.** *Pour out thy fury upon the heathen, who have not known thee.* This prayer is apparently inconsistent with the rule of charity; for, while we feel anxious about our own calamities, and desire to be delivered from them, we ought to desire that others may be relieved as well as ourselves. It would seem, therefore, that the faithful are to be blamed in here wishing the destruction of unbelievers, for whose salvation they ought rather to have been solicitous. But it becomes us to bear in mind what I have previously stated, that the man who would offer up such a prayer as this in a right manner, must be under the influence of zeal for the public welfare; so that, by the wrongs done to himself personally, he may not suffer his carnal affections to be excited, nor allow himself to be carried away with rage against his enemies; but, forgetting his individual interests, he must have a sole regard to the common salvation of the Church, and to what conduces thereto. Secondly, he must implore God to grant him the spirit of discretion and judgment, that in prayer he may not be impelled by an inconsiderate zeal: a subject which we have treated more at large in another place. Besides, it is to be observed, that the pious Jews here not only lay out of consideration their own particular advantage in order to consult the good of the whole Church, but also chiefly direct their eyes to Christ, beseeching him to devote to destruction his enemies whose repentance is hopeless. They, therefore, do not rashly break forth into this prayer, that God would destroy these or other enemies, nor do they anticipate the judgment of God; but desiring that the reprobate may be involved in the condemnation which they deserve, they, at the same time, patiently wait until the heavenly judge separate the reprobate from the elect. In doing this, they do not cast aside the

affection which charity requires; for, although they would desire all to be saved, they yet know that the reformation of some of the enemies of Christ is hopeless, and their perdition absolutely certain.

The question, however, is not yet fully answered; for, when in the seventh verse they arraign the cruelty of their enemies, they seem to desire vengeance. But what I have just now observed must be remembered, that none can pray in this manner but those who have clothed themselves with a public character, and who, laying aside all personal considerations, have espoused, and are deeply interested in, the welfare of the whole Church; or, rather, who have set before their eyes Christ, the Head of the Church; and, lastly, none but those who, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, have elevated their minds to the judgment of God; so that, being ready to forgive, they do not indiscriminately adjudge to death every enemy by whom they are injured, but only the reprobate. With regard to those who make haste in demanding the execution of the Divine vengeance before all hope of repentance is lost, Christ has condemned them as chargeable with inconsiderate and ill-regulated zeal, when he says,

“Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of,”

(Luke 9:55.)

Moreover, the faithful do not here simply wish the destruction of those who so wickedly persecuted the Church, but, using that familiarity which God allows them in their dealings with him, they set forth how inconsistent it would be did he not punish their persecutors,<sup>375</sup> and reason thus: Lord, how is it that thou afflictest us so severely, upon whom thy name is invoked, and sparest the heathen nations who despise thee? In short, they mean to say, that God has sufficient ground for executing his wrath elsewhere, since they were not the only people in the world who had sinned. Although it does not become us to prescribe to God the rule of his conduct, but rather patiently to submit to this ordination,

“That judgment must begin at the house of God”

(1 Peter 4:17;)

yet he permits his saints to take the liberty of pleading, that at least they may not be worse dealt with than unbelievers, and those who despise him.

These two sentences, *who have not known thee*, and *which call not upon thy name*, it is to be observed, are to be taken in the same sense. By these different forms of expression, it is intimated that it is impossible for any to call upon God without a previous knowledge of him, as the Apostle Paul teaches, in Romans 10:14,

“How, then, shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?” (Romans 10:14)

It belongs not to us to answer, “Thou art our God,” till He has anticipated us by saying, “Thou art my people,” (Hosea 2:23;) but he opens our mouths to speak to him in this manner, when he invites us to himself. *Calling on the name of God* is often synonymous with prayer; but it is not here to be exclusively limited to that exercise. The amount is, that unless we are directed by the knowledge of God, it is impossible for us sincerely to profess the true religion. At that time the Gentiles everywhere boasted that they served God; but, being destitute of his word, and as they fabricated to themselves gods of their own corrupt imaginations, all their religious services were detestable; even as in our own day, the human invented religious observances of the blind and deluded votaries of the Man of Sin, who have no right knowledge of the God whom they profess

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<sup>375</sup> “Mettans en avant l’absurdite qui en reviendrait, si Dieu ne punissoit les persecuteurs.” — *Fr.*

to worship, and who inquire not at his mouth what he approves, are certainly rejected by Him, because they set up idols in his place.

**8** *Remember not against us the iniquities of former times.* The godly Jews here confirm the sentiment which they had before briefly and obscurely touched upon, namely, that they had justly deserved the chastisements which had been inflicted upon them. And they present this prayer, because they could only get relief from their calamities by obtaining reconciliation with God. This is the sovereign remedy for every kind of adversity; for so long as he is angry with even our prosperity turns out to be unproductive of advantage and happiness. By *the iniquities of former times*, some understand the sins committed by the fathers. Others think that the sins which the suppliants themselves committed in their childhood and youth are intended. But the expression, I presume, has a more extensive signification, containing a confession not only of one offense or two, and these only recently committed, but an acknowledgement that they had for a long time been involved, along with their fathers, in manifold and old transgressions. Thus they acknowledge a long continued stubbornness, in which they had hardened themselves against God. This acknowledgement corresponds with the rebukes which the prophets administered to them; for sacred history bears testimony that the punishment of the captivity was suspended until God had proved from experience that their perversity was incurable. Nor should it excite our surprise to find the children praying that God would not impute to them the iniquity of their fathers, when we consider that the law declares that God casts the sins of the fathers into the bosom of their children, and takes vengeance upon their iniquities unto the third and fourth generation, (Exodus 20:5.) The contrast between the expressions, *make haste*, and *the iniquities of former times*, is worthy of notice. Had God called the Israelites to a strict account for all the sins which they had committed during three or four hundred years before, the time of their deliverance would have been long delayed. The faithful, therefore, beseech him to forget their former offenses, and to make haste to succor them. As their sins proved the great obstacle and cause of delay, we may see the propriety with which they farther implore that *the compassions of God might speedily meet them*.

**9** *Help O God of our salvation!* They again repeat in this verse, that whatever afflictions they endured were to be traced to the anger of God, and that they could have no comfort under them unless He were reconciled to them. Being deeply sensible that they had committed many transgressions, to strengthen their hope of obtaining pardon, they employ a variety of expressions. In the first place, as an argument to induce God to show them favor, they address him as *the God of their salvation*. In the second place, they testify that they bring nothing of their own to influence him to have mercy upon them; and that the only plea which they present before him is his own glory. From this we learn, that sinners are not reconciled to God by satisfactions or by the merit of good works, but by a free and an unmerited forgiveness. The observation which I have made a little before, and which I have explained more at length on the sixth psalm, is here to be kept in mind, — That when God visits us with the rod, instead of being merely desirous to be relieved from external chastisements, our chief concern ought to be to have God pacified towards us: nor should we follow the example of foolish sick persons, who are anxious to have merely the symptoms of their disease removed, and make no account of being delivered from the source and cause of it. With respect to the word *chapper*,<sup>376</sup> which expositors translate, *Be merciful*, or *propitious*, I have had an opportunity of speaking in another place. It properly signifies *to cleanse*, or *expiate*,

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<sup>376</sup> “ *chapper*, *be propitiated*, or *receive an atonement* ( *al chatoteinu*) on account of our sins.” — Dr Adam Clarke

and is applied to sacrifices. Whenever, therefore, we desire to obtain the favor of God, let us call to remembrance the death of Christ; for “without shedding of blood is no remissions” (Hebrews 9:22.)

### Psalm 79:10-13

**10.** Why should the heathen say, where is their God? Let the avenging of the blood of thy servants, which has been shed, be made known among the heathen in our sight. **11.** Let the sighing [or groaning] of the prisoner <sup>377</sup> come before thee, [or into thy presence:] and, according to the greatness of thy arm, reserve the children of death: <sup>378</sup> **12.** And recompense our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom <sup>379</sup> their reproach with which they have reproached thee, O Jehovah! **13.** And we thy people, and the sheep of thy pasture, will confess to thee <sup>380</sup> for ever; declaring thy praise from generation to generation.

**10.** *Why should the heathen say, Where is their God?* Here the people of God, in urging his name as a plea at the throne of grace: do so in a different sense from that in which they had urged it before. He extends his compassion towards us for his own name’s sake; for, as he is merciful, and will have our mouths stopped, that he alone may be accounted righteous, he freely pardons our sins. But here, the faithful beseech him that he would not allow his sacred name to be exposed to the blasphemies and insults of the wicked. From this we are taught that we do not pray in a right manner, unless a concern about our own salvation, and zeal for the glory of God, are inseparably joined together in our exercise. From the second clause of the verse, the same question may be raised which we have just now answered. Although God declares that he will execute vengeance upon our enemies, we are not warranted to thirst for revenge when we are injured. Let us remember that this form of prayer was not dictated for all men indiscriminately, that they might make use of it whenever impelled by their own passions, but that, under the guidance and instruction of the Holy Spirit, they might plead the cause of the whole Church, in common, against the wicked. If we would, therefore, offer up to God a prayer like this in a right manner, in the first place, our minds must be illuminated by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit; and, secondly, our zeal, which is often corrupted by the turbid affections of the flesh, must be pure and well-regulated; and then, with such a pure and well-tempered zeal, we may lawfully beseech God to show us, by evident examples, how precious, in his sight, is the life of his servants whose blood he avenges. The faithful are not to be understood as expressing any desire to be glutted with the sight of the shedding of human

<sup>377</sup> Horsley, who guesses that this psalm was composed during the distresses of Manasseh’s reign, supposes “the prisoner” to mean Manasseh.

<sup>378</sup> “C’est, les condamnez a mort.” — *Fr. marg.* “That is, those who are condemned to death.” “*Sons of death*, either those who were condemned to death because of their crimes, or condemned to be destroyed by their oppressors. Both these senses apply to the Israelites: they were sons of death, *i.e.*, worthy of death because of their sins against God. They were condemned to death, or utter destruction, by their Babylonish enemies.” — *Dr Adam Clarke.*

<sup>379</sup> “*Sevenfold, i.e.*, in excessively great measure, — (comp. Genesis 4:15, 24; 1 Samuel 2:5,) — *into their bosom.* This is an allusion to the custom of folding the loose garment worn by the natives of Eastern countries, so as to make it a recipient of gifts. Comp. Psalm 35:13; Isaiah 65:6; Jeremiah 32:18; Luke 6:38.” — *Cresswell.*

<sup>380</sup> “C’est, te rendrons graces.” — *Fr. marg.* “That is, will give thee thanks.”

blood,<sup>381</sup> as if they longed greedily after it: they only desire that God would grant them some confirmation of their faith, in the exercise of his fatherly love which is manifested when he avenges the wrongs done to his own people.<sup>382</sup> It is farther to be noticed, that the appellation, *the servants of God*, is given to those who, nevertheless, were justly punished on account of their sins; for although he may chastise us, yet he does not forthwith cast us off, but, on the contrary, testifies thereby that our salvation is the object of his care. Again, we know that when the anger of God is extended over the whole body of the Church, as the good and the bad are mingled together in her, the former are punished in common with the latter, even as Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Daniel, and others, were carried into captivity. They were not, it is true, altogether faultless; but it is certain that so great a calamity was not brought upon the Jews on their account. In their person, there was rather set forth a spectacle to the ungodly, that they might be the more deeply affected.

**11.** *Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee.* The people of God, I have no doubt, were in captivity when the Holy Spirit endited this prayer; and, therefore, the name of *prisoners* is applied to them all in general, because they were so shut up within the bounds of Assyria and Chaldea, that had they stirred one foot thence, they would have incurred the penalty of death. They are called *the children of death*; by which is meant, that they were appointed or condemned to death in respect of their captivity. This sentence, however, may not improperly be restricted to a small number who were shut up in prison under closer restraint. By this expression, it is intimated that those proud spirits who had before vaunted themselves against God, were now broken and effectually humbled. *The greatness of God's arm*, that is to say, the greatness of his power,<sup>383</sup> is implored; for without a signal and extraordinary interposition on his part, no hope could be entertained of the restoration of the Church.

**12** *And render to our neighbors sevenfold.* We have already said enough on the subject of vengeance; and here the faithful show still more clearly, that they are not so much moved by the injuries done to themselves personally, as inflamed with a holy zeal when they see the sacred name of God blasphemed, and, as it were, torn in pieces by the wicked. If this affection reign in our hearts, it will easily moderate the ungovernableness of our flesh, and if the wisdom of the Spirit is added to it, our prayers will be in strict accordance with the just judgment of God.

In the last verse, the pious Jews declare that the fruit of their deliverance will be, that *the name of God will be celebrated*; and we ought not to desire our preservation or welfare for any other end. When he freely bestows upon us all things, the design for which he does this is, that his goodness may be made known and exalted. Now, these sufferers engage to make a grateful acknowledgement of their deliverance, and declare that this will not be done merely for a short time, but that the remembrance of it will be transmitted to their posterity, and pass, in continued succession, from age to age to the end of the world. The particular designation here given to them is also worthy of notice: *We are thy people, and the sheep of thy pasture* As the posterity of Abraham were chosen to celebrate the name of God, and that his praises might resound in Zion, what would have been the consequence had that people been destroyed, but that the memory of the name of God would have perished? This passage, there is no doubt, corresponds with that prophecy of Isaiah,

“This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise.” (Isaiah 43:21)

<sup>381</sup> “Car ce n'est pas que les fideles se veuillent yci souler a veoir espandre le sang humain.” — *Fr.*

<sup>382</sup> “Laquelle apparoit quand il fait la vengeance des outrages qu'on a faits aux siens.” — *Fr.*

<sup>383</sup> “C'est a dire, de la puissance de Dieu.” — *Fr.*

## PSALM 80

This is a sorrowful prayer, in which the faithful beseech God that he would be graciously pleased to succor his afflicted Church. To excite him the more readily to grant them relief in their distressing circumstances, they compare these circumstances with the condition of the Church in her beginnings, when the Divine favor was conspicuously manifested towards her.

*To the chief musician upon Sosannim Eduth. A Psalm of Asaph.*

This psalm is almost similar to the preceding; but, in my apprehension it was composed in behalf of the ten tribes, after that kingdom began to be wasted by various calamities. It is not without reason that mention is expressly made of Joseph, Ephraim, and Manasseh. Some expositors allege, that in this there is an allusion to the situation and order of the camps of the chosen tribes in the wilderness, as described by Moses in Numbers 2:18-21; for Manasseh and Ephraim marched together on one side.<sup>384</sup> But it would have been strange to have passed over in silence the tribe of Judah, and also the holy city, and to have brought forward the tribes of Joseph, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Benjamin, had it not been intended to speak especially of the kingdom of Israel.<sup>385</sup> If it is objected, that the ten tribes from the time when they were cut off from the house of David had become degenerate, and that the worship of God was corrupted among them, I answer, that there dwelt among them, notwithstanding, many devout worshippers of God, who had not bowed the knee before Baal, nor abandoned themselves to the prevailing superstition, (1 Kings 19:18.) Accordingly, Amos (Amos 6:6) finds fault with the hard-heartedness which existed in the tribe of Judah, because there was none among them who was “grieved for the affliction of Joseph.” It is also well known, that during the time of this defection, some prophets were sent to them to inspire them with the hope of deliverance. Although, then, the vast proportion of them were apostates, yet God did not cease to exercise his care over the seed which remained in the midst of them. And as

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<sup>384</sup> This is the opinion of Hammond, who supposes that this psalm “is a complaint of the troubles of God’s Church and people, probably in time of captivity, or by way of prediction of it.” “Why Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, and no other, are here named,” says he, “must be learned from the order of the Israelites’ march in the wilderness, Numbers 2. For there, next after the ark, the pledge of God’s special presence and assistance, did these three tribes follow: ‘Then the tabernacle of the congregation shall set forward,’ etc., verse 17; ‘On the west side (*i.e.*, next behind it) shall be the standard of the camp of Ephraim,’ verse 18; ‘and his host,’ etc., verse 19. ‘And by him shall be the tribe of Manasseh,’ verse 20; ‘and his host,’ etc., verse 21. ‘Then the tribe of Benjamin, and his host,’ verses 22, 23. Now the returning from the captivity, the desire whereof is the business of this psalm, being a parallel to the delivery from Egypt, God’s ‘leading them back, stirring up himself, and coming to save them,’ is very fitly begged, and described in a style resembling the former rescue.” Merrick accounts for Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, being particularly specified, by supposing the psalm to have been written at a time when some enemy was advancing towards these tribes, which were contiguously situated, or was directing his march to Jerusalem, through their territories. “Such an occasion,” he observes, “might make it very proper for the Psalmist to pray that the people of those tribes might particularly be made spectators of the divine interposition. If the psalm was not written on any such occasion, it may be most reasonable to suppose, that Benjamin, Joseph’s only brother by the same mother, and Ephraim and Manasseh his sons, are in the second verse equivalent to Joseph; who, in the preceding verse, represents the whole posterity of Israel.”

<sup>385</sup> The argument which Calvin here adduces in support of the opinion, that this psalm relates to the ten tribes which constituted the kingdom of Israel, in contradistinction to the kingdom of Judah, is evidently inconclusive. He seems to have forgotten the fact that the tribe of Benjamin, which is expressly specified, did not belong to the kingdom of Israel, but formed a part of the kingdom of Judah, — a fact which is altogether destructive of the argument by which he attempts to prove that the psalm relates exclusively or especially to the kingdom of Israel. The whole of God’s ancient people seem therefore to be intended. It may farther be observed, that the calamities which are referred to are so extensive and general, as to render it in a high degree probable, that the entire body of that people are spoken of. This view is also confirmed, from the introduction of the similitude of a vine transplanted from Egypt. The subject of the psalm may be the same with that of the 79th — the calamitous condition into which the chosen people were brought by the arms of Nebuchadnezzar.

formerly he had mitigated coming calamities, by promising beforehand his grace; so now, by dictating to the people a form of prayer, he confirms and encourages them in the hope of obtaining his grace, until they found, from actual experience, that they had not been deceived by vain promises. From this, we perceive in what respect this and the preceding psalm differ from each other. If any one considers what I have now stated unsatisfactory, he is at liberty to adopt a different view. But I flatter myself, that whoever carefully weighs all the circumstances, will readily acquiesce in my opinion. I will not insist upon the words *Sosannim* and *Eduth*, having already, in Psalm 45th, stated the opinions of interpreters concerning them; nor is this a matter of so great importance as to render it necessary to expend much labor upon it. Besides, those who are most learned in antiquities adduce nothing but probable conjectures.

### Psalm 80:1-3

**1.** Hearken, O Shepherd of Israel! who leadest Joseph like a flock: thou who sittest between the cherubim, shine forth. **2.** In the sight of Ephraim, and Benjamin, and Manasseh, stir up<sup>386</sup> thy strength, and come to our deliverance. **3.** Turn us again, O God! cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.

**1** *Hearken, O Shepherd of Israel!* The prophet, previous to his naming Manasseh and Ephraim, makes mention of Joseph; and why does he speak of Joseph rather than of Judah, but because it was his design to treat separately of the kingdom of Israel, the government of which was in the family and posterity of Joseph? Nor, since God sent special prophets among them, after he had stricken them with his rods, is there any inconsistency when, at the same time, the prayer is added, That God would gather together the remnant to himself. Moreover, that they might not delude themselves by trusting in their spurious worship, the prophet, by applying to God the appellation of *Him who sitteth between the Cherubim*, calls them back to the pure doctrine of the law. The mercy-seat was a pledge of the presence of God, where he had promised to be near his people to hear their prayers. This divinely instituted form, it was unlawful for men to change at their own pleasure. The Israelites, then, are admonished to return to their original state, if they would expect to find God gracious towards them. Besides, by the title which is here attributed to God, there is expressed his wonderful love towards men in humbling, and, so to speak, lowering himself in order to come down to them, and choose for himself a seat and habitation on the earth, that he might dwell in the midst of them. Properly speaking, God cannot be said to sit; nor is it to be supposed that it is possible for him, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, to be shut up in a certain place, (1 Kings 8:27.) But, in accommodation to the infirmity of men, he is represented as placed between the two Cherubim, that the faithful might not imagine him to be far from them; and, consequently, be perplexed with doubt and apprehension in approaching him. At the same time, the remark which I have previously made must be borne in mind, that the Israelites are here furnished with a rule for enabling them to pray in a right manner, that they might be withdrawn from the worship of the god fabricated and set up by themselves at Dan and Bethel, and that, rejecting all superstitions, they might yield themselves to be guided by the true light of faith, and follow the Word of God.

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<sup>386</sup> The original word for “stir up” is, *orera*, from *ur*, was excited “This word,” says Dimock, “seems to convey the idea of God’s having been *asleep* during the Babylonish captivity. See Isaiah 51:9.”



**3** *Turn us again, O God!* The meaning of this prayer is, Restore us to our former state. They had petitioned, in the preceding verse, that God would stir up his strength in the sight of Ephraim and Manasseh; and now they complain that they are but castaways until God succor them, and remedy their miserable dispersion. Some understand the words, *turn us again*, in a different way; namely, as a prayer that God would bestow upon them the spirit of regeneration. But this interpretation being too refined, it will be better, adhering to the former sense, to view the expression as meaning that the faithful, under the adversity with which they were afflicted, betake themselves to God, whose peculiar work it is to restore life to the dead. They acknowledge, on the one hand, that all their miseries were to be traced to this as their cause, that God, being angry on account of their sins, hid his face from them; and, on the other hand, they expect to obtain complete salvation solely through the Divine favor. It will be to us, they say, a resurrection indeed, if once thy countenance shine upon us. Their language implies, that provided God extended his mercy and favor to them, they would be happy, and all their affairs would prosper.

### Psalm 80:4-7

**4.** O Jehovah, God of Hosts! how long wilt thou be incensed<sup>387</sup> against the prayer of thy people? **5.** Thou hast fed us with bread of tears; and hast given us tears to drink in great measure. **6.** Thou hast made us a strife to our neighbors: and our enemies laugh at us among themselves. **7.** Turn us again, O God of Hosts! and cause thy face to shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

**4** *O Jehovah, God of Hosts!* God having in the Scriptures freely promised, and so often assured us, that the prayers of his people will not be disappointed, it may excite our surprise to find the faithful here alleging before him, that he continues unpacified, although they betake themselves to him. They complain not only that they are not heard, but also that he *is angry*, when they call upon him; as if he purposely rejected this religious service. Where, then, it may be said, is that promise recorded in Isaiah 65:24, “Before they call I will answer?” To this I would answer, That as God, by delaying to succor his people, tries their patience, the prophet, speaking according to the judgment of the flesh, represents him as deaf to their prayers. Not that it is proper for those who pray to rest in this opinion, which would throw an insuperable obstacle in their way to the throne of grace. It rather becomes them to strive to cherish, in opposition to it, the judgment of faith; and to penetrate even into heaven, where they may behold a hidden salvation. But still God permits them, the more effectually to disburden their minds, to tell him of the cares, anxieties, griefs, and fears, with which they are distressed. In the mention here made of *the smoke of God’s wrath*, there appears to be an implicit allusion to the incense which was used in the sacrifices under the law. The smoke of the incense served to purify the air; but the Israelites complain that the heavens were so obscured by a different smoke, that their sighs could not come up to God.

**5** *Thou hast fed us with bread of tears, etc.* By these forms of expression, they depict the greatness of their grief, and the long continuance of their calamities; as if they had said, We are so

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<sup>387</sup> Literally, “wilt thou smoke (with wrath;”) *i.e.*, be very angry. — See Psalm 74:1.

filled with sorrow, that we can contain no more.<sup>388</sup> They add, in the following verse that *they were made a strife to their neighbors* This admits of being explained in two ways. It means either that their neighbors had taken up a quarrel against them; or that, having obtained the victory over them, they were contending about the spoil, as is usually the case in such circumstances, each being eager to drag it to himself. The former interpretation, however seems to be the more suitable. The people complain that, whereas neighborhood ought to be a bond of mutual goodwill, they had as many enemies as neighbors. To the same purpose is their language in the second clause, *They laugh at us among themselves*; that is to say, They talk among themselves by way of sport and mockery at our adversities. To encourage and stir themselves up to repentance, they ascribe all this to the judgment of God, in whose power it is to bend the hearts of men. Since we are all at this day chargeable with the same sins, it is not surprising that our condition is in no degree better than was theirs. But the Holy Spirit having inspired the prophet to write this form of prayer for a people who felt their condition to be almost desperate, it serves to inspire us with hope and boldness, and to prevent us from giving up the exercise of prayer, under a consciousness of the greatness of our guilt. The seventh verse is a repetition of the third; and this repetition is undoubtedly intended as a means of surmounting every obstacle. God did not here intend to endite for his people a vain repetition of words: his object was to encourage them, when bowed down under the load of their calamities, boldly to rise up, heavy though the load might be. This ground of support was often presented to them; and it is repeated the third time in the concluding verse of the psalm.

### Psalm 80:8-13

**8.** Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast expelled the heathen, and planted it. **9.** Thou hast cleansed the ground before it: thou hast rooted its roots, and it hath filled the land. **10.** The mountains were covered with its shadow, and its branches were like the cedars of God.<sup>389</sup> **11.** It extended its branches to the sea, and its shoots to the river.<sup>390</sup> **12.** Why then hast thou broken

<sup>388</sup> “There cannot,” says Bishop Horne, “be a more striking picture of Zion in captivity! Her bread is dipped in tears; and her cup is filled to the brim with them: no time is free from grief and lamentation!”

<sup>389</sup> The LXX. read this verse as follows. *Εκάλυψεν ὄρη ἡ σκιά αὐτῶς, καὶ αἱ ἀναδενδράδες αὐτῶς τὰς κέδρους τοῦ Θεοῦ* “The shadow thereof covered the hills, and the branches thereof [covered] the cedars of God.” The LXX. seem to have read *casah, covered*, instead of *cossu, were covered* With this agree the versions of the Syriac, Arabic, and Vulgate; and this is the reading adopted by Hare, Houbigant, Lowth, and Horsley. “Is it an extravagant image of a flourishing vine,” says Lowth, “to say, that it climbed up even the highest cedars, spread itself along the branches, and covered the very top of them?” “The image,” says Merrick, “may, I think, well be allowed in the description of an allegorical vine, which is represented as stretching out her branches unto the sea, and her boughs unto the river; especially when compared with what Kaempfer says of some foreign vines. ‘Maximum proventum vites tribuunt, quae nulla jutae cultura palmites per summa spargunt fastigia arborum.’ — *Amoenitat Exot Fascic 2, Relat 9, Section 2, page 390*. The author of the History of the Piratical States of Barbary (published in 1750) informs us that some of the vines near Algiers ‘climb to the tops of very lofty trees, and, extending themselves to others, form natural bowers,’ page 163. And Beverley, in his History of Virginia, (page 116, ed. 2d.) affirms that he has seen great trees covered with single vines, and those vines almost hidden with grapes. [...] The vine’s covering the cedars, in the Psalmist’s description, might be intended to suggest an idea not only of its extent, but also of its sovereignty, (agreeably to what Musculus writes on the place: ‘*Operti fuerunt montes umbra ejus, et ramis ejus cedri Dei*: Ponit haec de potentia regni Israelitici,’ etc.) as a Greek poet has, from this very circumstance, represented the vine as the mistress of the trees. (Nonnus, *Dionysiac* L. 12, 278, 279.)”

<sup>390</sup> *The sea — the river — i.e., the Mediterranean, which was the Western, and the Euphrates, which was the Eastern boundary of Palestine. The Divine promise respecting the extent of the territory of the chosen people runs in these terms, (Deuteronomy*

down its hedges, so that all who pass by the way pluck [or tear] it in pieces? **13.** The boar out of the forest <sup>391</sup> hath wasted it; <sup>392</sup> and the wild beast of the field hath eaten it up.

**8** *Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt.* Under the figure of a vine, the singular grace which God was graciously pleased to exercise towards his people after he had redeemed them is celebrated; and this powerfully contributed to inspire them with the hope of being heard. For which of us can be so presumptuous as to dare to come into the presence of God until he himself has previously invited us? Now, he allures us to himself both by his benefits and by his word. The object in view in now presenting his liberality before him is, that he should not leave unfinished the work of his hands which he had commenced. It is indeed true that, without his word, the benefits which he has conferred upon us would make a faint impression upon our hearts; but when experience is added to the testimony of his word, it greatly encourages us. Now, the redemption of which mention is here made was inseparably connected with the covenant of God; for he had, even four hundred years before, entered into covenant with Abraham, in which he promised the deliverance of his seed. What is stated amounts in short to this, that it is unbecoming that God should now suffer the vine which he had planted and cultivated so carefully with his own hand to be wasted by wild beasts. God's covenant was not made to last only for a few days, or for a short time: when he adopted the children of Abraham, he took them under his keeping for ever. By the word *vine*, is intimated the high place which this people held in the estimation of God, who not only was pleased to hold them as his own inheritance, but who also distinguished them by peculiar honor, even as a vine excels all other possessions. When it is said that the *land or ground was cleansed*, this is a repetition of what had been previously stated, that the *heathen were cast out* to make room for the chosen people. Perhaps, however, the allusion is to the continual digging which vines require, in order to their being kept clean lest they should degenerate; this allusion being made with the view of showing how God had performed the part of a good husbandman towards his people, since, after having planted them, he did not cease to employ every means to cherish and preserve them. What is added immediately after, *Thou hast rooted its roots*, is not to be understood of the planting of it at first, but of the pains taken by God to propagate it, <sup>393</sup> which is a part of the culture of the vine. Whence it follows that *the mountains were covered with its shadow*; for the whole country, although mountainous, was filled with inhabitants; so much did that people increase in number. The branches of this vine are compared to *the cedars of God*, that is, to the most beautiful and most excellent cedars; thereby to express still more vividly how eminently the seed of Abraham were blessed of

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11:24,) "From the river Euphrates to the uttermost sea shall your coast be." And it was fulfilled in the days of Solomon, (1 Kings 4:21; Psalm 72:8.) In his time there were Hebrew colonies and garrisons near the river Euphrates.

<sup>391</sup> According to the Talmud, the middle letter of the word rendered *forest* in this verse, is the middle letter of the Hebrew Psalter.

<sup>392</sup> *The boar out of the forest hath wasted it.* "This terrible animal is both fierce and cruel, and so swift, that few of the savage tribes can outstrip him in running. His chief abode, says Forbes, is in the forests and jungles; but, when the grain is nearly ripe, he commits great ravages in the fields and sugar plantations. That ferocious and destructive animal, not satisfied with devouring the fruit, lacerates and breaks with his sharp and powerful tusks the branches of the vine, or, with his snout, digs it up by the roots, pollutes it with his touch, or tramples it under his feet." — (*Paxton's Illustrations*, volume 2, page 66.) Homer complains of the ravages of this animal, (Iliad, 9. 535;) and Mr Ward remarks, that the buffaloes and wild hogs make the like ravages in the orchards of the Hindoos; to prevent which, men are placed day and night in proper situations to guard against them. — (*Ward's Hindoos*, volume 2, page 327.)

<sup>393</sup> "Mais du travail qu'il avoit prins a la provigner." — *Fr.*

God. The sea and the Euphrates, as is well known, were the divinely appointed boundaries of the land promised them for an inheritance.

**12** *Why then hast thou broken down its hedges?* This is the application of the similitude; for nothing seems more inconsistent than that God should abandon the vine which he had planted with his own hand, to be rooted up by wild beasts. It is true that he often threatened and forewarned the people by his prophets that he would do this; but what constrained him to inflict upon them so strange and dreadful a species of punishment was, that he might render their ingratitude the more detestable. At the same time, it is not without reason that true believers are enjoined to take encouragement from such distinguished liberality on the part of God; that, even in the midst of this rooting up, they might at least hope that He, who never forsakes the work of his own hands, would graciously extend his care towards them, (Psalm 138:8.) The people were brought to desolation, on account of their own incurable obstinacy; but God did not fail to save a small number of shoots, by means of which he afterwards restored his vine. This form of supplicating pardon was, indeed, set forth for the use of the whole people, with the view of preventing a horrible destruction. But as very few sought to appease the wrath of God by truly humbling themselves before him, it was enough that these few were delivered from destruction, that from them a new vine might afterwards spring up and flourish. The indignity which was done to the Church is aggravated from the contrast contained in the words, when God, on the one hand, is exhibited to us as a vine-keeper, and when the destroyers of this vine, on the other, are represented to be not only all that pass by, but also the wild boars and other savage beasts. The word *קירסם*, *kiresem*, which I have translated *to waste*, is taken by some for *to fill the belly*.<sup>394</sup> This sense would very well agree with the present passage; but it is not supported by the ordinary meaning of the word.

## Psalm 80:14-19

**14.** Return, I beseech thee, O God of Hosts! look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine, **15.** And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and upon<sup>395</sup> the branch<sup>396</sup> which thou hast strengthened for thyself. **16.** It is burnt with fire; it is cut down; <sup>397</sup> they perish at the

<sup>394</sup> “*קירסם*, (*jechar-semenna*,) will destroy it Targum, Will tear it up with its tusk *פוט פיה* From *קירסם*, he cut off, cut down, consumed, a quadrilateral, same as the Chaldaic *קירסם*. Occurs here only in Scripture, and, according to others, is compounded of *קירסם*, a belly, as though *קירסם*, will fill the belly from it.” — Bythner

<sup>395</sup> “Hammond thinks it most probable that *אל*, upon, is an expletive, or that it may refer to *קירסם*, *reeh*, behold or look, the last verb except one in the preceding verse, *קירסם אל*, look upon

<sup>396</sup> The original word which Calvin renders *branch* is *בן*, *ben*, son “Where,” says Horsley, “does *בן* signify a branch?” It is; however, so used in Genesis 49:22, where it is said, “Joseph is a fruitful *בן*, *ben*, bough, or branch, by a well.” The reading of some MSS., and of the Septuagint, Vulgate, Syriac, Æthiopic, and Arabic versions, is *the son of man*, as in the 17th verse; and eighteen of Kennicott’s and De Rossi’s MSS. read *בן אדם*, *ben adam*, son of man It has been thought by many that Christ is here intended. Aben Ezra and R. Obadiah thus interpret the passage. The Chaldee paraphrase is, “And upon the King Messiah whom thou hast strengthened for thyself.” Hare, Green, Horsley, and Morison, consider the last clause of this verse, “and the branch which thou hast strengthened for thyself,” as a misplaced anticipation of the latter clause of the 17th verse.

<sup>397</sup> Horsley thinks that the word *קירסם*, *kesuchah*, which Calvin renders as a verb, “it is cut down,” is probably the noun *קירסם*, with the comparative *קירסם*, *caph*, prefixed — “It is consumed in fire like refuse;” and he refers to Parkhurst’s Lexicon, under the roots, *קירסם*, and *קירסם*. “This verse,” says he, “with the two preceding, should be thus rendered: —

‘Return, we beseech thee, O God of Hosts!  
Look down from heaven and behold, And visit this vine;

rebuke of thy countenance. **17.** Let thy hand be upon the Man of thy right hand, upon the Son of man whom thou hast strengthened for thyself. **18.** And we will not go back from thee: thou shalt quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. **19.** Turn us again, O Jehovah, God of Hosts! cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.

**14.** *Return, I beseech thee, O God of Hosts!* In these words it is intended to teach, that we ought not to yield to temptation although God should hide his face from us for a time, yea even although to the eye of sense and reason he should seem to be alienated from us. For, provided he is sought in the confident expectation of his showing mercy, he will become reconciled, and receive into his favor those whom he seemed to have cast off. It was a distinguished honor for the seed of Abraham to be accounted the vineyard of God; but while the faithful adduce this consideration as an argument for obtaining the favor of God, instead of bringing forward any claims of their own, they only beseech him not to cease to exercise his accustomed liberality towards them. The words, *from heaven*, have, no doubt, been introduced, that the faithful might find no difficulty in extending their faith to a distance, although God, from whom they had departed, was far from them; and, farther that if they saw no prospect of deliverance upon earth, they might lift up their eyes to heaven.

As to the word , *cannah*,<sup>398</sup> in the beginning of the 15th verse, I readily acquiesce in the sense given of it by some who translate it, *a place prepared*; but as some think that there is a change in the Hebrew word of the letter , *gimel*, into , *caph*, so that the reading should be , *gannah*, *a garden* or *vineyard*, we leave the reader to judge for himself. It is, however, certain that this is a metaphor akin to the former, by which is denoted the singular liberality of God in advancing this people, and causing them to prosper. The vine-branch which was planted by the hand of God is also called *the Man of his right hand*.

**16** *It is burnt with fire.* The calamities of the people are now more clearly expressed.<sup>399</sup> It had been said that the Lord's vine was abandoned to the wild beasts, that they might lay it waste. But it was a greater calamity for it to be consumed with fire, rooted up and utterly destroyed. The Israelites had perfidiously apostatised from the true religion; but, as has been previously observed, they were still a part of the Church. We are accordingly warned by this melancholy example, of the severity of the punishment due to our ingratitude, especially when it is joined with obstinacy, which prevents the threatenings and rebukes of God, however sharp and severe they may be, from

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Even the plant which thine own right hand planted,  
Burnt with fire like refuse. —

At the rebuke of thy countenance they shall perish,"

— *they shall perish: They*, the spoilers of the vineyard, described under the image of the wild boar and beast in the 13th verse. "The Bishop's reading of verse 16," says Dr Morison, "is very satisfactory." "*They perish*. This should either be rendered as by our translators and Mr Ainsworth, and then the words refer to the vine of the Jewish Church; but if in the future, as by Bishop Horsley, it must refer to their heathen persecutors. Bishop Horne mentions both, and the original will admit of either." — *Williams*.

<sup>398</sup> "Surely, , should not be translated *vineyard*, but *plant*: and probably should be translated, or understood to mean, *even* See Noldius, *Sign.* 38." — *Archbishop Secker* "Michaelis and Gesenius derive it from , *textit*, with the suffix . Bochart considers it an Egyptian word. ' , verito *plantam* ex sententia Bocharti (in Phaleg. lib. 1, cap. 15 and 16, edit. Leusd.) qui putat vocem esse Ægyptiacam. Nam, auctore Plutarcho in Iside, hederam Ægyptii χενόριτυ, h. e. φυτὸν Οσιριδος, *plantam* Osiridis vocabant." Dathe. De Rossi concurs." — *Rogers' Book of Psalms, etc.*, volume 2, 231.

<sup>399</sup> Under the same allegorical imagery the Prophet Ezekiel represents the afflicted state of his country, (Ezekiel 19:10, 12, 13.)

being of any benefit to us. Let us also learn from the same example, when the Divine anger is blazing all around, and even when we are in the midst of its burning flames, to cast all our sorrows into the bosom of God, who, in a wonderful manner, raises up his Church from the gulf of destruction. He would assuredly be ready not only to exercise without interruption his favor towards us, but also to enrich us with his blessings more and more, did not our wickedness hinder him. As it is impossible for him not to be angry at the many offenses which we have committed, it is an evidence of unparalleled mercy for him to extinguish the fire which we ourselves have kindled, and which has spread far and wide, and to save some portion or remnant of the Church, or, to speak more properly, to raise up even from the very ashes a people to call upon his name. It is again repeated that the Church *perished* not by the strength and arms of her enemies, but at the rebuke of God's countenance. Never can we expect any alleviation of our punishment, unless we are fully persuaded that we are justly chastised by the hand of God. It was a good sign of the repentance of these Israelites that, as is observed in Isaiah 9:12, "they looked to the hand of him who smote them."

**17** *Let that hand be upon the Man of thy right hand.* Here the Psalmist repeats in plain words the prayer which he had expressed under the figure of a vineyard, pleading that God would defend, under his hand, *the Man of his right hand, and the Son of man whom he hath strengthened for himself*. It is uncertain whether he speaks of the king alone, or whether the people also are included. Although Jeroboam was anointed to be king, yet he did not come to the possession of the royal dignity in a lawful way; and God never so approved of any of his successors, as to divest the posterity of David of the right and power of dominion. God, as we have seen in Psalm 78:67, did not choose the tribe of Ephraim. on the contrary, the scepter, by his immutable decree, was given to the house of Judah, as is plainly taught in the prophecy of Jacob, (Genesis 49:10.) It was therefore a base and wicked dismembering of the body, when the majority of the people revolted from the house of David, and submitted themselves to Jeroboam as their king. Such being the ease, why then, it may be said, is the king of Israel prayed for in this manner? For removing this difficulty, let it be observed, that although that kingdom had an untoward commencement, and God, as is stated in Hosea 13:11, gave them a king in his anger, yet he was afterwards pleased to tolerate its continuance; and the anointing of Jeroboam testified that he had ratified what had been unadvisedly and wickedly done by the tumult and rebellion of the people. The nation of Israel might therefore say that their king was created and established by God, who, with the view of remedying the rupture which had been made, added him as a sharer in the royal dignity to the children of David. By that rent the state of the people was greatly impaired; but, to prevent an entire overthrow, the erection of the ten tribes into a separate kingdom, under the sovereignty of Jeroboam, was, as it were, a pillar put under it by the secret counsel of God to uphold it.

I have, however, no hesitation in considering the whole body of the Church as comprehended under the expressions, *the Man of God's right hand, and the Son of man*. The similar number is very properly made use of, it having been the Divine will that the chosen people should be as one man. For the same reason, the Apostle Paul also, in Galatians 3:16, lays great stress upon the words, *one seed*; for Ishmael, Esau, and others, were separated and scattered when God redeemed and gathered together the seed of Abraham. Thus, by *the Son of man* is to be understood the people whom God had adopted to himself, that they might be as one man.<sup>400</sup> But as this oneness depended

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<sup>400</sup> Muis, Walford, and others, in like manner, suppose these titles, *The Man of thy right hand, and The Son of man*, to belong to the people of Israel. Walford translates the 15th and 17th verses thus: —

upon the head, I readily admit that the phrase has a particular reference to the king, who preserved the greater part of the people from being involved in utter destruction. Here again the Prophet, in seeking to obtain the Divine favor, finds his argument and hope only upon the benefits which God had formerly conferred upon them. "Lord," as if he had said, "since it belongs to thee to perfect that which thou hast begun, preserve the king whom thou hast given us!"

In the 18th verse, the faithful engage, upon God's hearing them, gratefully to acknowledge his goodness, not only by rendering to him the sacrifice of praise, but also by their whole life. *Calling upon God's name*, is here to be understood of "the calves of the lips," (Hosea 45:3;) but when it is said, *We will not go back from thee*, this means the uniform and continued course of the whole life. The verse, however, may be interpreted thus: O Lord! we will continue in our obedience to thee, even when our circumstances, so far as we can perceive, are hopeless; never shall the sharpness of our calamities have the effect of driving us to apostasy from thee: and when we are restored by thy grace and power, we will magnify thy name. It would be superfluous to make any farther observations on the last verse, which is repeated for the third time.

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"The scion, which thy right hand planted;  
Even the branch, which thou madest strong for thyself.  
Let thy support be extended to the Man of thy right hand;  
To the Son of man, whom thou madest strong for thyself."

And he observes on the 17th verse, "The Psalmist here quits the figurative representation, and speaks literally of the people of Israel, whom God had chosen, and so greatly favored." "From comparing 2 Chronicles 36:22, 23; Isaiah 44:26-28; 45:1-11, and Jeremiah 25:12, 13," says Dimock, "with this verse, might not Jeremiah, or whoever was the author of this psalm, mean *Cyrus*, by these titles, who was prophesied of as the restorer of Israel, by *name*, above a hundred years before his birth?" It has been thought by others, and it is highly probable, that the phraseology here employed contains a mystic allusion to the Messiah. The pious Israelites were accustomed, in times of great calamity, to look forward with longing desire to the days of Him who should reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of whose kingdom there should be no end. These striking expressions, *The Man of thy right hand*, and *The Son of man*, apply in the fullest and most perfect sense to Christ. If *the Man of God's right hand* be the man placed there, to whom can the title apply but to him? for, "to which of the angels said God at any time, Sit on my right hand?" (Hebrews 1:3;) and much less has he said this of any Jewish king. As to the other appellation, *The Son of man*, it is one of Christ's most definite titles, being given to him in Scripture no less than seventy-one times; in sixty-seven instances by himself; once by Daniel; once by the martyr Stephen; and twice by the Apostle John in the Revelation. He it is, too, whom the Father has made strong for the salvation of his Church, and who will yet turn away iniquity from the chosen people, and restore them to a place in the Church, so that henceforth they "will not go back from God."

# PSALM 81

This psalm consists of two parts. Whoever was its author, he exhorts the people to remember the unparalleled grace of God towards them, in delivering them by his outstretched arm, and choosing them to be a kingdom of priests, and a peculiar Church to himself; that thus they may be excited devoutly to honor their deliverer, both by celebrating his praises, and by leading a holy life. God is next introduced as upbraiding them for their ingratitude in continuing obstinately to refuse to submit to the yoke of the law, notwithstanding the tender and gracious manner in which he allured them to himself.

*To the chief musician upon Gittith. A Psalm of Asaph.* <sup>401</sup>

## Psalm 81:1-3

**1.** Sing joyfully to God our strength sing with a loud voice: to the God of Jacob. **2.** Raise a song, <sup>402</sup> and bring forth the tabret, the pleasant harp, with the psaltery. <sup>403</sup> **3.** Sound the trumpet at the new moon; at the time appointed on the day of our sacrifice. <sup>404</sup> **4.** For this is a statute to Israel, a law to the God of Jacob. **5.** He set it for a testimony in Joseph, when he went forth over [or above] the land of Egypt: I heard a language which I understood not. **6.** I removed his shoulder from the burden; his hands were freed from the pots. <sup>405</sup> **7.** Thou didst cry in trouble, and I delivered thee: I answered thee in the secret place of thunder: I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Selah.

<sup>401</sup> There are various opinions as to the time and occasion of the composition of this psalm. Bishop Horsley observes, "It is certainly older than the time of David; for the use of Joseph's name, in the 5th verse, as the name of the whole nation, shows that it was composed before Judah became the principal tribe, while the place of worship was in the tribe of Ephraim; that is, among Joseph's descendants." "This, however," says Fry, "is not conclusive, as a psalm, whenever composed, referring to the events of those times, might use the same distinctions." According to Walford, it "was most likely written to be sung at some celebration of the feast of the Passover, during the reign of Jehoshaphat or of Hezekiah." But the generally received opinion is, that it was composed, in the first instance, for the feast of trumpets. This feast was celebrated on the first day of the month *Tisri*, which was the beginning of the Jewish year, answering to our September. It has been supposed by some, that this feast was appointed in commemoration of the creation of the world, which is conjectured to have been completed at that season of the year. The Hebrew months were lunar, and the first day of each month had its religious services, accompanied with sound of trumpets, Numbers 10:10; but the feast of trumpets was kept with additional sacrifices, Leviticus 23:24; Numbers 29:1. The trumpets were blown from sunrise until sunset. It appears from the book of the Jewish Liturgy, that this psalm is still sung at that feast. "It may have been used," observes Dr Adam Clarke, "in celebrating the feast of trumpets on the first of Tisri; the feast of tabernacles, on the fifteenth of the same month; the creation of the world; the feast of the new moons; and the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt; to all which circumstances it appears to refer."

<sup>402</sup> "Take a psalm. Ainsworth, *Take up a psalm*. Bishop Horsley says, "The word (psalm) must in this place denote some musical instrument." But, with all due deference to his Lordship, suppose a clergyman in the present day were to say to his clerk, 'Strike up a psalm!' (quite a similar phrase,) would the clerk understand him to mean a musical instrument? Certainly not." — *Williams*.

<sup>403</sup> For an account of these musical instruments, see Appendix.

<sup>404</sup> Hammond translates this verse thus, "Blow the trumpet on the first day of the month, on the new moon, on the day of our feast." "The word ,", says he, "must here be rendered, *in the beginning of the month*, that so , that follows, may be rendered, as it truly signifies, *in the new moon*. It is true, that from , *new*, indifferently signifies the *novilunium*, and *the first day of the month*; but here, *the new moon* being peculiarly expressed by , to avoid tautology, must be rendered *the new month*; i.e., *the first day of the month*. The Syriac sets this down here most expressly, 'In the beginning or first of the month, and in the new moon;' which, meeting always together, were festival among the Jews, and so the trumpet was to be sounded thereon." [Note: The Hebrew words and stems being discussed in this footnote require punctuation which cannot be shown using the OLBHEB font. The reader should refer to the original commentary for the actual punctuation. — *sg.*]

<sup>405</sup> The word translated *pot* was, according to Kennicott, a large vessel in which the earth was mixed and worked up for making the bricks. The LXX. the Vulgate, Symmachus, Jerome, Street, Parkhurst, Ainsworth, Fry, Walford, and others, render the original word, by *the basket*. Parkhurst observes, that baskets might probably be employed both in carrying the earth of which the bricks were made, and also the bricks themselves.



**1** *Sing joyfully to God our strength.* This psalm, it is probable, was appointed to be sung on the festival days on which the Jews kept their solemn assemblies. In the exordium, there is set forth the order of worship which God had enjoined. They were not to stand deaf and dumb at the tabernacle; for the service of God does not consist in indolence, nor in cold and empty ceremonies; but they were, by such exercises as are here prescribed, to cherish among themselves the unity of faith; to make an open profession of their piety; to stir up themselves to continual progress therein; to endeavor to join, with one accord, in praising God; and, in short, to continue steadfast in the sacred covenant by which God had adopted them to himself.

Such having been the use of festival days under the law, we may conclude, that whenever true believers assemble together at the present day, the end which they ought to have in view is to employ themselves in the exercises of religion — to call to their remembrance the benefits which they have received from God — to make progress in the knowledge of his word — and to testify the oneness of their faith. Men only mock God by presenting to him vain and unprofitable ceremonies, unless the doctrine of faith go before, stirring them up to call upon God; and unless, also, the remembrance of his benefits furnish matter of praise. Yea, rather it is a profanation of his name, when people quench the light of divine truth, and satisfy themselves with performing mere outward service. Accordingly, the faithful are here not only enjoined to come together to the tabernacle, but are also taught the end for which they are to assemble there, which is, that the free and gracious covenant which God has made with them may be brought anew to their remembrance, for increasing their faith and piety, that thus the benefits which they have received from him may be celebrated, and their hearts thereby moved to thanksgiving. With respect to the *tabret, harp, and psaltery*, we have formerly observed, and will find it necessary afterwards to repeat the same remark, that the Levites, under the law, were justified in making use of instrumental music in the worship of God; it having been his will to train his people, while they were as yet tender and like children, by such rudiments, until the coming of Christ. But now when the clear light of the gospel has dissipated the shadows of the law, and taught us that God is to be served in a simpler form, it would be to act a foolish and mistaken part to imitate that which the prophet enjoined only upon those of his own time. From this, it is apparent that the Papists have shown themselves to be very apes in transferring this to themselves. Under the *new moon*, by the figure synecdoche, is comprehended all the other high feasts. Sacrifices were daily offered; but the days on which the faithful met together at the tabernacle, according to the express appointment of the law, are called, by way of eminence, *the days of sacrifice*.

**4** *For this is a statute to Israel.* To give the more effect to the preceding exhortation, it is here taught that this law or ordinance had been prescribed to God's ancient people, for the purpose of ratifying the everlasting covenant. And as in covenants there is a mutual agreement between the parties, it is declared that this *statute was given to Israel*, and that God, in contracting, reserved this for himself, as a right to which he was justly entitled.

**5** *He set it for a testimony in Joseph.* The Hebrew word *eduth*, is by some derived from *adah*, which signifies *to adorn*; and they translate it *the honor or ornament* of Joseph. But it rather comes from the verb *ud*, *to testify*; and the scope of the passage requires that it should be translated *a testimony or covenant*. Farther, when Joseph is named in particular, there is a reference to the first original of the chosen people, when, after the death of Jacob, the twelve tribes were distinguished. As the sovereignty had not at that time come to the tribe of Judah, and as Reuben

had fallen from his right of primogeniture, the posterity of Joseph justly had the pre-eminence, on account of the benefits which he had been instrumental in conferring; having been the father and nourisher of his brethren and of the whole nation. Moreover, the sacredness of the covenant is commended by a special appeal to the fact, that at the time when God stipulated that this honor should be yielded to him, he had purchased that people to himself; as if it had been said, The condition upon which the people were delivered was, that they should assemble together on the days appointed for renewing the remembrance of the grace which had been exercised towards them. The words *when he went forth* will apply equally to God and to the people.<sup>406</sup> It is a common form of expression to speak of God as going forth before his people, as a shepherd goes before his flock, or as a general before his army. When it is said ABOVE *the land of Egypt*, some think there is an allusion to the situation of Judea, which was higher than that of Egypt; so that those who come out of Egypt to Judea ascend. But I understand the language as meaning simply, that the people, having God for their conductor, passed freely and without obstruction through the land of Egypt, the inhabitants having been so discouraged and dismayed as not to dare to make any opposition to their passage.<sup>407</sup> The prophet enhances the blessing of their deliverance, when, speaking in the name of the whole people, he affirms that he had been rescued from profound barbarism: *I heard a language which I understood not*.<sup>408</sup> Nothing is more disagreeable than to sojourn among a people with whom we can hold no communication by language, which is the chief bond of society. Language being, as it were, the image and mirror of the mind, those who cannot employ it in their mutual intercourse are no less strangers to one another than the wild beasts of the forest. When the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 33:19) intends to denounce a very dreadful punishment, he says, “Thou shalt see a fierce people, a people of a deeper speech than thou canst perceive; of a stammering tongue, that thou canst not understand.” Thus the people acknowledge that the benefit which God conferred was so much the more to be valued, because they were delivered from the Egyptians, with whose language they were unacquainted.<sup>409</sup>

**6** *I have removed his shoulder from the burden*. Here God begins to recount the benefits which he had bestowed upon the Israelites, and the many ways in which he had laid them under obligations to him. The more galling the bondage was from which they had been delivered, the more desirable and precious was their liberty. When, therefore, it is affirmed that their burdens were so heavy that they stooped under them, and that they were doomed to the labor of making bricks, and to other slavish and toilsome occupations, the comparison of this their first state with their condition afterwards is introduced to illustrate the more strikingly the greatness of the blessing of their deliverance. Let us now apply this to ourselves, and elevate our minds to a higher subject, of which

<sup>406</sup> “*When he went forth*, etc.; *i.e.*, When God went forth to destroy the first-born in all the land of Egypt, on account of which the passover was appointed.” — *Walford*.

<sup>407</sup> “Going forth ( ) over the land of Egypt seems to express dominion over it, which God exercised in bringing out the Israelites; and they were then in what may be called a state of superiority over the Egyptians, and went out with a high hand. Exodus 14:8; Numbers 33:3. And soon after that the law was given.” — *Archbishop Secker*

<sup>408</sup> The Septuagint, Syriac, Vulgate, and all the versions except the Chaldee, have the third person, “*He* heard a language which *he* understood not;” Doederlein reads, “I heard a voice which I understood not;” and retaining the first person, interprets the words as an abrupt exclamation of the Psalmist upon feeling himself suddenly influenced by a divine afflatus, and upon hearing an oracle addressed to him by God, which consisted of what immediately follows, from the 6th verse to the close of the psalm, and which is spoken in the person of God. This voice he heard, but he did not understand it; that is, he did not fully comprehend its design and import.

<sup>409</sup> “The Egyptian language was not intelligible to the children of Jacob; for Joseph spake to his brethren by an interpreter, when he appeared as ruler of Egypt, and did not as yet choose to make himself known to them. See Genesis 42:23.” — *Street*.

it was an image. As God has not only withdrawn our shoulders from a burden of brick, and not only removed our hands from the kilns, but has also redeemed us from the cruel and miserable tyranny of Satan, and drawn us from the depths of hell, the obligations under which we lie to him are of a much more strict and sacred kind than those under which he had brought his ancient people.

*7 Thou didst cry in trouble, and I delivered thee.* Here the same subject is prosecuted. By their crying when they were in distress, I understand the prayers which they then offered to God. It sometimes happens that those who are reduced to extremity bewail their calamities with confused crying; but as this afflicted people still had in them some remains of godliness, and as they had not forgotten the promise made to their fathers, I have no doubt that they directed their prayers to God. Even men without religion, who never think of calling upon God, when they are under the pressure of any great calamity, are moved by a secret instinct of nature to have recourse to Him. This renders it the more probable that the promise was, as it were, a schoolmaster to the Israelites, leading them to look to God. As no man sincerely calls upon Him but he who trusts in him for help; this crying ought the more effectually to have convinced them that it was their duty to ascribe to Him alone the deliverance which was offered them. By *the secret place of thunder* some, in my opinion, with too much refinement of interpretation, understand that God by thundering rendered the groanings of the people inaudible to the Egyptians, that by hearing them the Egyptians might not become the more exasperated. But the meaning simply is, that the people were heard in a secret and wonderful manner, while, at the same time, manifest tokens were given by which the Israelites might be satisfied that they were succoured by the Divine hand. God, it is true, was not seen by them face to face; but the thunder was an evident indication of his secret presence among them.<sup>410</sup> To make them prize more highly this benefit, God upbraidingly tells them that they were unworthy of it, having given such a manifest proof *at the waters of Meribah*,<sup>411</sup> that they were of a wicked and perverse disposition, Exodus 17:7. Your wickedness, as if he had said, having at that time so openly shown itself, surely it must from this be incontrovertible that my favor to you did not proceed from any regard to your good desert. This rebuke is not less applicable to us than to the Israelites; for God not only heard our groanings when we were afflicted under the tyranny of Satan, but before we were born appointed his only begotten Son to be the price of our redemption; and afterwards, when we were his enemies, he called us to be partakers of his grace, illuminating our minds by his gospel and his Holy Spirit; while we, notwithstanding, continue to indulge in murmuring, yea, even proudly rebel against Him.

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<sup>410</sup> Bishop Lowth understands by “the secret place of thunder” the communication of the Israelites with God upon mount Sinai, the awfulness of which is expressed by these few words. (Lowth’s *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, volume 2, page 220.) Walford reads, “I answered thee by thunder, from a hidden retreat;” and he observes, that this contains “a reference to the majestic display on Sinai, where, though the symbols of the present Deity were seen and heard, the lightnings and thunders, he himself was concealed from all human view.” The only objection which can be made against interpreting this of Sinai is, that the murmuring at Meribah, Exodus 17, was before the thundering on Sinai, Exodus 19; whereas here the thunder is mentioned first, and then what took place at Meribah in the end of the verse. But this objection is easily removed; for in the poetical compositions of Scripture strict order is not, always observed in the narration of facts. Thus in Psalm 83:9, the victory over the Midianites (Judges 7) is mentioned before that over Sisera, (Judges 4,) which was the victory first achieved.

<sup>411</sup> Literally “the waters of contradiction;” *meribah*, from *rub*, to quarrel, being a noun signifying *contention, strife* It is therefore fitly used as the name of the place in the desert where the Israelites quarrelled with Moses. “The local specification,” observes Bishop Mant, “as used in our Bible translation, is much more poetical than the rendering in the Common Prayer-Book, ‘the waters of strife.’” “The mention of Meribah,” says Lowth, “introduces another idea, namely, the ingratitude and contumacy of the Israelites, who appear to have been ever unmindful of the favors and indulgence of their heavenly Benefactor.”

## Psalm 81:8-12

**8.** Hear, O my people! and I will protest to thee: <sup>412</sup> O Israel! if thou wilt hearken to me. **9.** Let there be no strange god in thee: neither worship thou a strange god. **10.** I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. **11.** But my people hearkened not to my voice, and Israel would none of me **12.** And I gave them up to the thoughts <sup>413</sup> of their own heart: they shall walk in their own counsels.

**8** *Hear, O my people!* The more effectually to touch the hearts of the people, God is here invested with the character of a teacher, and introduced as speaking familiarly in the midst of the congregation; and this is done for the purpose of instructing them, that all assemblies are unprofitable and trifling in which the voice of God stirring up men to faith and true godliness is not uttered. But let us proceed to the consideration of the words. This preface was intended to teach in a few words, that festival days were not purely and rightly observed unless the people listened with attention to the voice of God. In order to consecrate their hands, feet, eyes, and their whole persons, to his service, it behoved them, in the first place, to open their ears to his voice. Thus the lesson is taught that he acknowledges as his servants those only who are disposed to become learners. By the word *protest* he intimates that he covenants after a solemn manner, thereby to give his words the greater authority. The clause which follows, *O Israel! if thou wilt hearken to me*, is, I presume, an abrupt expression, similar to what is frequently employed in pathetic discourses, the ellipse serving to express the greater earnestness. Some connect it with the following verse in this way, *O Israel! if thou wilt hearken to me, there will be no strange god in thee* But it is rather to be viewed as the language of regret on the part of God. He indirectly intimates that he distrusts this obstinate and rebellious people, and can hardly indulge the hope that they will prove obedient and teachable.

**9** *Let there be no strange god* <sup>414</sup> *in thee*. Here there is propounded the leading article of the covenant, and almost the whole sum of it, which is, that God alone must have the pre-eminence. Some may prefer this explanation: O Israel! if thou wilt hearken to me, there is nothing which I more strictly require or demand from thee than that thou shouldst be contented with me alone, and that thou shouldst not seek after strange gods: and of this opinion I am far from disapproving. God by this language undoubtedly confirms the truth which he so frequently inculcates elsewhere in the law and the prophets, that he is so jealous a God as not to allow another to be a partaker of the honor to which he alone is entitled. But at the same time he teaches us that true religious worship begins with obedience. The order which Moses observes is different, Exodus 20:2, 4, and Deuteronomy 5:6, 8. In these passages God sets out with declaring that he is the God of Israel; and then he forbids them to make for themselves any new gods. But here the prohibition is put first,

<sup>412</sup> Street reads, "and I will make a testimony with thee." " " says he, "is in the hiphil conjugation, which frequently signifies to make or cause a thing to be made. The ark is called *the ark of the testimony*, Exodus 30:26, and *the ark of the covenant*, Joshua 3:6, and Exodus 25:21. Moses is commanded to put *the testimony* which God shall give him into the ark. It is plain, therefore, that the covenant and the testimony are the same." "*I will testify unto thee* I will, upon all occasions, give the oracular direction, so that thou shalt have no occasion to resort to other gods, nor shall any pretended god have power to harm thee." — *Horsley*

<sup>413</sup> "Ou, perversite, ou, durete." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, the perversity, or, the hardness." Hammond reads: "I gave them up unto the imaginations of their hearts." *Horsley*: "So I gave them up to the government of their own hearts." *Fry*: "And I gave them up to the desires of their heart." *Walford*: "Therefore I gave them up to the purposes of their heart."

<sup>414</sup> "Heathen, or foreign god." — *Hammond*.

and then the reason of it is subjoined, which is, that the people ought to be abundantly satisfied with the God who had purchased them to be his people. Perhaps also he sets this in the front to prepare the way for his obtaining the throne of their hearts. He would first withdraw the people from superstitions, as these must necessarily be plucked up and cleared away before true religion can take root in our hearts.

**10.** *I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide.* God, by making mention of the deliverance which he had wrought for the people, put a bridle upon those whom he had taken under his protection, by which he might hold them bound to his service; and now he assures them, that with respect to the time to come, he had an abundant supply of all blessings with which to fill and satisfy their desires. The three arguments which he employs to induce the Israelites to adhere exclusively to him, and by which he shows them how wickedly and impiously they would act in turning aside from him, and having recourse to strange gods, are worthy of special attention. The first is, that he is *Jehovah*. By the word *Jehovah*, he asserts his claims as God by nature, and declares, that it is beyond the power of man to make new gods. When he says *I am Jehovah*, the pronoun *I* is emphatic. The Egyptians, no doubt, pretended to worship the Creator of heaven and of earth; but their contempt of the God of Israel plainly convicted them of falsehood. Whenever men depart from Him, they adorn the idols of their own invention with His spoils, whatever the specious pretexts may be by which they attempt to vindicate themselves. After having affirmed that he is *Jehovah*, he proves his Godhead from the effect and experience, — from the clear and irrefragable evidence of it in his delivering his people from Egypt, and especially, from his performing at that time the promise which he had made to the fathers. This is his second argument. The power which was displayed on that occasion ought not to have been contemplated apart by itself, since it depended upon the covenant, which long before he had entered into with Abraham. By that deliverance he gave a proof not less of his veracity than of his power, and thus vindicated the praise which was due to him. The third argument is, that he offers himself to the people for the time to come; assuring them, that, provided they continue to persevere in the faith, he will be the same towards the children as the fathers experienced him to be, his goodness being inexhaustible: *Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.* By the expression *open wide*, he tacitly condemns the contracted views and desires which obstruct the exercise of his beneficence. “If the people are in penury,” we may suppose him to say, “the blame is to be entirely ascribed to themselves, because their capacity is not large enough to receive the blessings of which they stand in need; or rather, because by their unbelief they reject the blessings which would flow spontaneously upon them.” He not only bids them open their mouth, but he magnifies the abundance of his grace still more highly, by intimating, that however enlarged our desires may be, there will be nothing wanting which is necessary to afford us full satisfaction. Whence it follows, that the reason why God’s blessings drop upon us in a sparing and slender manner is, because our mouth is too narrow; and the reason why others are empty and famished is, because they keep their mouth completely shut. The majority of mankind, either from disgust, or pride, or madness, refuse all the blessings which are offered them from heaven. Others, although they do not altogether reject them, yet with difficulty take in only a few small drops, because their faith is so straitened as to prevent them from receiving an abundant supply. It is a very manifest proof of the depravity of mankind, when they have no desire to know God, in order that they may embrace him, and when they are equally disinclined to rest satisfied with him. He undoubtedly here requires to be worshipped by external service; but he sets no value upon the bare name of Deity — for his majesty does not consist in

two or three syllables. He rather looks to what the name imports, and is solicitous that our hope may not be withdrawn from him to other objects, or that the praise of righteousness, salvation, and all blessings, may not be transferred from him to another. In calling himself by the name *Jehovah*, he claims Godhead exclusively to himself, on the ground that he possesses a plenitude of all blessings with which to satisfy and fill us.

**11.** *But my people hearkened not to my voice.* God now complains, that the Israelites, whom he endeavored gently to allure to him, despised his friendly invitation; yea, that although he had for a long time continued to exhort them, they always shut their ears against his voice. It is not a rebellion of one day which he deploras: he complains, that from the very beginning they were always a stupid and hardened people, and that they continued to persevere in the same obstinacy. It is assuredly monstrous perverseness to exclude God from obtaining access to us, and to refuse to give him a hearing, when he is ready to enter into covenant with us, making the terms almost equal on both sides. To leave them no room for extenuating their guilt under the pretense of ignorance, he adds, that he was rejected with avowed and deliberate contempt: *Israel would none of me.* From this it is evident, that their minds were bewitched by the god of this world.

This is the reason why, as is stated in the following verse, *he gave them up to the hardness of their own heart*, or, as others translate it, *to the thoughts of their own heart*. The root *shor*, from which the word rendered *thoughts* is derived, signifies properly *the navel*. Accordingly, the translation is very appropriate, which takes this word either for the thoughts which are wrapped up in the hearts of men, or for the hardness which possesses the heart. It being, however, as is well known, a usual thing in the Psalms for the same thing to be twice repeated, I have preferred the word *thoughts*, because it follows immediately after, *They shall walk in their own counsels*. Besides, by these words, God testifies, that he justly punished his people, when he deprived them of good and wholesome doctrine, and gave them over to a reprobate mind. As in governing us by means of his word, he restrains us, as it were, with a bridle, and thereby prevents us from going astray after our own perverse imaginations, so, by removing his prophets from the Jews, he gave loose reins to their froward and corrupt counsels, by which they were led into devious paths. It is assuredly the most dreadful kind of punishment which can be inflicted upon us, and an evidence of the utter hopelessness of our condition, when God, holding his peace, and conniving at our perverseness, applies no remedy for bringing us to repentance and amendment. So long as he administers reproof to us, alarms us with the dread of judgment, and summons us before his tribunal, he, at the same time, calls upon us to repent. But when he sees that it is altogether lost labor to reason any longer with us, and that his admonitions have no effect, he holds his peace, and by this teaches us that he has ceased to make our salvation the object of his care. Nothing, therefore, is more to be dreaded, than for men to be so set free from the divine guidance, as recklessly to follow their own counsels, and to be dragged by Satan wherever he pleases. The words, however may be viewed in a more extensive sense, as implying that the patience of God being worn out, he left his people, who, by their desperate perverseness, had cut off all hope of their ever becoming better, to act without restraint as they chose. It is a very absurd inference which some draw from this passage, that the grace of God is bestowed equally upon all men until it is rejected. Even at that time, God, while he passed by all the rest of the world, was graciously pleased to bring the posterity of Abraham, by peculiar and exclusive privilege, into a special relation to himself. At the present day, this distinction, I admit, has been abolished, and the message of the gospel, by which God reconciles the world to himself, is common to all men. Yet we see how God stirs up godly teachers in one

place rather than in another. Still the external call alone would be insufficient, did not God effectually draw to himself those whom he has called. Further, as this passage teaches us, that there is no plague more deadly than for men to be left to the guidance of their own counsels, the only thing which remains for us to do is to renounce the dictates of carnal wisdom, and to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

### Psalm 81:13-16

**13.** O if my people had hearkened to me! If Israel had walked in my ways! **14.** I would soon have brought their enemies low, and turned my hand against their adversaries. **15.** The haters of Jehovah would have lied to him, and their time should have been everlasting. **16.** I <sup>415</sup> would have fed them with the fat of corn: and I would have satisfied thee with honey from the rock.

**13.** *O if my people had hearkened to me!* By the honorable designation which God gives to the people of Israel, He exposes the more effectually their shameful and disgraceful conduct. Their wickedness was doubly aggravated, as will appear from the consideration, that although God called them to be his people, they differed nothing from those who were the greatest strangers to him. Thus he complains by the Prophet Isaiah,

“The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib:  
but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.”  
(Isaiah 1:3)

The Hebrew particle , *lu*, which I have rendered *O if!* is not to be understood as expressing a condition, but a wish; and therefore God, I have no doubt, like a man weeping and lamenting, cries out, O the wretchedness of this people in wilfully refusing to have their best interests carefully provided for! He assumes the character of a father, and observing, after having tried every possible means for the recovery of his children, that their condition is utterly hopeless, he uses the language of one saddened, as it were, with sighing and groaning; not that he is subject to human passions, but because he cannot otherwise express the greatness of the love which he bears towards us. <sup>416</sup> The Prophet seems to have borrowed this passage from the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:29, where the obstinacy of the people is bewailed in almost the same words: “Oh that they were wise,

<sup>415</sup> In our English Bible it is, “*He* should have fed them.” The LXX., Vulgate, and Syriac versions, Green, Walford, and others, read as Calvin does, “I would have fed them.” “This is the preferable reading,” says Walford, “as the common lection introduces a too sudden change of person.”

<sup>416</sup> “Nothing,” says Dr Adam Clarke on this verse, “can be more plaintive than the original: *sense* and *sound* are surprisingly united. I scruple not to say to him who understands the Hebrew, however learned, he has never found in any poet, Greek or Latin, a finer example of deep-seated grief, unable to express itself in appropriate words, without frequent interruptions of sighs and sobs, terminated with a mournful cry —

*Loo-ghammee-shomeagh-lee*  
*Yishrael-bid’ rakee-yehallekoo!*

“He who can give the proper guttural pronunciation to the letter , *ayin*; and gives the , *vau*, and the , *yod*, their full Asiatic sound; and does not pinch them to death by a compressed and worthless European enunciation; will at once be convinced of the propriety of this remark.”

that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" He means tacitly to upbraid the Jews, and to impress upon their minds the truth, that their own perverseness was the only cause which prevented them from enjoying a state of great outward prosperity. If it is objected, that God in vain and without ground utters this complaint, since it was in his power to bend the stiff necks of the people, and that, when he was not pleased to do this, he had no reason to compare himself to a man deeply grieved; I answer, that he very properly makes use of this style of speaking on our account, that we may seek for the procuring cause of our misery nowhere but in ourselves. We must here beware of mingling together things which are totally different — as widely different from each other as heaven is distant from the earth. God, in coming down to us by his word, and addressing his invitations to all men without exception, disappoints nobody. All who sincerely come to him are received, and find from actual experience that they were not called in vain. At the same time, we are to trace to the fountain of the secret electing purpose of God this difference, that the word enters into the heart of some, while others only hear the sound of it. And yet there is no inconsistency in his complaining, as it were, with tears, of our folly when we do not obey him. In the invitations which he addresses to us by the external word, he shows himself to be a father; and why may he not also be understood as still representing himself under the image of a father in using this form of complaint? In Ezekiel 18:32, he declares with the strictest regard to truth, "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth," provided in the interpretation of the passage we candidly and dispassionately take into view the whole scope of it. God has no pleasure in the death of a sinner: How? because he would have all men turned to himself. But it is abundantly evident, that men by their own free-will cannot turn to God, until he first change their stony hearts into hearts of flesh: yea, this renovation, as Augustine judiciously observes, is a work surpassing that of the creation itself. Now what hinders God from bending and framing the hearts of all men equally in submission to him? Here modesty and sobriety must be observed, that instead of presuming to intrude into his incomprehensible decrees, we may rest contented with the revelation which he has made of his will in his word. There is the justest ground for saying that he wills the salvation of those to whom that language is addressed, (Isaiah 21:12,) "Come unto me, and be ye converted." In the second part of the verse before us, we have defined what it is to hear God. To assent to what he speaks would not be enough; for hypocrites will grant at once that whatever proceeds from his mouth is true, and will affect to listen just as if an ass should bend its ears. But the clause is intended to teach us that we can only be said to hear God, when we submit ourselves to his authority.

**14.** *I would soon have brought their enemies low.* Here the Israelites are taught, that all the calamities which had befallen them were to be imputed to their own sins; for their enemies did not fight against them with any other strength than that with which they were supplied from above. God had promised that under his leading the chosen people would prove victorious over all their enemies; and now to take away all ground for charging him with violating his word, he affirms that he would not have failed to enable them to do this had he not been prevented by their sins. He doubtless intends tacitly to remind them that the victories which they had formerly achieved were not owing to their own military valor, but to Him under whose conduct they had been placed. Now, he tells them that he was not only kept back by their sins from putting forth his power to defend them, but that he was also compelled by their perverseness to rush against them with the sword in his hand, while he left their enemies to remain in undisturbed tranquillity.

**15.** *The haters of Jehovah would have lied to him.* Here the same thought is pursued, when the Israelites are informed that their enemies would have humbly submitted to their authority had not



their impiety emboldened them to run to excess, when they shook off the yoke of God, and waxed wanton against him. In calling these enemies *the enemies of Jehovah*, it is intended to censure the folly of the Israelites in breaking the bond of the covenant made between God and them, and thereby separating themselves from him, and preventing him from forthwith engaging in war in their behalf against those who were alike their and his enemies. As earthly princes, when they are disappointed of the assistance promised by their allies, are excited to enter into terms of agreement with their enemies, and in this way avenge themselves on those who have been found to be guilty of perjury and covenant-breakers; so God declares that he had spared his own enemies, because he had been treacherously and wickedly deceived by the people of Israel. Why does he permit his avowed enemies to remain unpunished, and cease for a time to maintain his own glory, if it is not because his object is to set them in contrast with his own rebellious and disobedient people, whom, by this means, he intends to subdue? The meaning of the word , *cachash*, which we have rendered *lied*, has been explained in a previous psalm <sup>417</sup>. It is here intimated that peace with the reprobate cannot be looked for except in so far as God restrains their rage by hidden chains. A lion shut up in an iron cage still retains his own nature, but he is kept from mangling and tearing in pieces those who are not even more than five or six feet distant from him. Thus it is with respect to the wicked. They may greedily desire our destruction; but they are unable to accomplish what their hearts are set upon; yea God humbles and abases their fierceness and arrogance, so that they put on the appearance of gentleness and meekness. The amount of the whole is, that it was the fault of the Israelites themselves that their enemies prevailed against them, and insolently triumphed over them; whereas, had they continued the humble and obedient children of God, these enemies would have been in a state of subjection to them. When it is said, *their time should have been everlasting*, <sup>418</sup> the expression is to be referred to the promises; and so must the abundance of *wheat* and of *honey*, with which they would have been fully satisfied. God had solemnly declared that he would be their protector and guardian even to the end. The change, then, which so suddenly befell them is set before them as a matter of reproach, inasmuch as they had deliberately cast away all at once their happy state. The same remarks are applicable to the fruitfulness of the land. How is it to be accounted for that they suffered hunger in the land in which God had promised them abundance of wheat and honey, but because the blessing of God had been withheld on account of their iniquity? By *the fat of corn* <sup>419</sup> is meant, metaphorically, pure grain, unless it may be thought preferable to understand it of the finest wheat. Some are of opinion that the expression, *honey out of the rock*, is hyperbolical, implying that honey would have flowed from the very rocks rather than that God would have failed to satisfy his people. But as it is evident from sacred history that honey was found everywhere in the hollows of the rocks <sup>420</sup> so long as they enjoyed the blessing of God, the meaning simply is, that the grace

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<sup>417</sup> See volume 1, page 301.

<sup>418</sup> “*Their time*, etc.: that is, the time, the continuance, the prosperity of my people, would have been durable.” — *Warner*.

<sup>419</sup> It is an usual phrase with the Hebrews to call the most esteemed part of anything , *cheleb*, “the fat.” The word is used with this combination in Deuteronomy 32:14; and is adopted again in Psalm 147:14. See also Genesis 45:18; Numbers 18:29; and Psalm 73:4. The translators of our English version have rendered it here “the finest of the wheat.”

<sup>420</sup> Palestine abounded in wild bees, which, living in the crevices of rocks, and in the hollows of trees, furnished honey in great plenty. To this there are frequent allusions in Scripture. In Deuteronomy 32:13, Moses, speaking of God’s goodness to Israel in the song with which he closed his long and eventful career, says, “He made him suck honey out of the rock.” As an evidence of the great abundance of wild honey in that country, we may refer to 1 Samuel 14:25, where it is said, “And all they of the land came to a wood, and there was honey upon the ground; and when the people were come to the wood, behold the honey dropped.” In proof of the same point, reference may be also made to the fact, that a part of the food of John the Baptist in the wilderness

of God would have continued to flow in an unbroken and uniform course, had it not been interrupted by the perverseness and wickedness of the people.

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was wild honey, which most probably he found in rocks or hollow trees. In Scripture, the country is frequently described by a familiar phrase, as “A land flowing with milk and honey;” and in Job 20:17, we meet with the strong expression of “Brooks, floods, and rivers of honey.” Palestine is still remarkable for this natural production. It may be observed, that the change of person in this last verse from the third to the first is highly poetical.

# PSALM 82

As kings, and such as are invested with authority, through the blindness which is produced by pride, generally take to themselves a boundless liberty of action, the Psalmist warns them that they must render an account at the bar of the Supreme Judge, who is exalted above the highest of this world. After he has reminded them of their duty and condition, perceiving that he speaks to such as refuse to receive admonition, he calls upon God to vindicate his character as a righteous judge.

421

*A Psalm of Asaph.*

## Psalm 82:1-4

**1.** God sitteth in the assembly of God: he will judge in the midst of the gods.<sup>422</sup> **2.** How long will ye judge unjustly? and accept the persons of the wicked? Selah. **3.** Determine the cause of the poor and the orphan; justify<sup>423</sup> the helpless and the destitute. **4.** Rescue the poor and the afflicted: deliver them out of the hand of the wicked.

**1** *God sitteth in the assembly of God.*<sup>424</sup> It is unquestionably a very unbecoming thing for those whom God has been pleased to invest with the government of mankind for the common good, not to acknowledge the end for which they have been exalted above others, nor yet by whose blessing they have been placed in so elevated a station; but instead of doing this, contemning every principle of equity, to rule just as their own unbridled passions dictate. So infatuated are they by their own splendor and magnificence, as to imagine that the whole world was made only for them. Besides, they think that it would derogate from their elevated rank were they to be governed by moderate counsels; and although their own folly is more than enough to urge them on in their reckless career, they, notwithstanding, seek for flatterers to soothe and applaud them in their vices. To correct this arrogance, the psalm opens by asserting, that although men occupy thrones and judgment-seats, God nevertheless continues to hold the office of supreme ruler. God has made even a heathen and licentious poet bear testimony to this truth in the following lines: —

<sup>421</sup> Kimchi thinks it probable that this psalm was written in the days of Jehoshaphat, and refers to 2 Chronicles 19:5-7, as indicating the time and occasion of its composition. We are there informed that Jehoshaphat; “set judges in the land, throughout all the fenced cities of Judah, city by city;” and in instructing them with regard to their duty, he uses nearly the same words as those in the beginning of this psalm. Dr Morison takes a different view. “This psalm,” says he, “was composed in all probability in the days of Hezekiah, in reference to certain wicked magistrates, (2 Chronicles 29:30.) who had grievously perverted the administration of justice, who were guilty of great oppression, and who had done much to introduce a state of general national corruption. King Jehoshaphat had reformed several public abuses which had crept into the judicatories of Israel in his time, (2 Chronicles 19:7.) but before the reign of Hezekiah, things had reverted to their former unhappy condition; so that a public national reformation was loudly demanded. The psalm contains an exhortation to the judges of Israel, and a reproof for their negligence and oppression.”

<sup>422</sup> “Ou, il jugeras au milieu les dieux.” — *Fr. marg.* “Or, he will judge in the midst the gods.”

<sup>423</sup> “C’est, faites justice.” — *Fr. marg.* “That is, do justice to.”

<sup>424</sup> Horsley translates the first verse thus: —

“God standeth in the assembly;  
God, in the midst of the gods, giveth sentence.”

On which he has the following note: — “In what assembly? The assembly of his holy angels. The Psalmist, I think, poetically imagines the celestial court assembled for the business of this review of the proceedings of the earth’s judges, and God, in the midst of his angels, taxing their iniquity, and awarding their punishment.”

*“Regum timendorum in proprios greges,  
Reges in ipsos imperium est Jovis,  
Clari giganteo triumpho,  
Cuncta supercilio moventis.”*

**Horatii, Carm. Liber in Ode i.**

*“Kings rule their subject flocks; great Jove  
O'er kings themselves his reign extends,  
Who hurl'd the rebel giants from above;  
At whose majestic nod all nature bends.”*

**Boscawen's Translation.**

That the potentates of this world may not arrogate to themselves more than belongs to them, the prophet here erects a throne for *God*, from which he judges them all, and represses their pride; a thing which is highly necessary. They may, indeed, admit that they owe their elevation to royal power to the favor of God, and they may worship him by outward ceremonies, but their greatness so infatuates them that they are chargeable with expelling and casting him to a distance from their assembly, by their vain imaginations; for they cannot bear to be subject to reason and laws. Thus the design of the prophet was to deride the madness by which the princes of this world are bewitched, in leaving God no place in their assembly. The more effectually to overthrow this irrational self-confidence with which they are intoxicated, civil order is termed *the assembly of God*; for although the divine glory shines forth in every part of the world, yet when lawful government flourishes among men, it is reflected therefrom with pre-eminent lustre. I indeed grant that it is quite common for the Hebrews to adorn with the title of *God* whatever is rare and excellent. But here it would appear, from the scope of the passage, that this name of the Divine Being is applied to those who occupy the exalted station of princes, in which there is afforded a peculiar manifestation of the majesty of God; even as Solomon, in Proverbs 2:17, calls marriage “the covenant of God,” from the peculiar sanctity by which that relation is distinguished.

In the second clause of the verse, it is not material whether we read, *He will judge in the midst of the gods*, or, *He will judge the gods in the midst*. The first construction, however, is the most easy and natural, That however much the rulers of the world may exalt themselves, they cannot in the least impair the authority of God, by divesting him of his sovereignty over them and of the government of all things, which he will ever retain as his inalienable prerogative. But here, as also a little after, the name *gods* is to be understood of *judges*, on whom God has impressed special marks of his glory. To apply it to angels is a fancy too strained to admit of serious consideration.

**2** *How long will ye judge unjustly?* Many suppose that God is here introduced speaking, and that these are the words which he utters from his throne of judgment. But I would rather consider the prophet himself as the speaker, who, in order to prepare the way for administering a rebuke, had spoken in the manner in which he did in the first verse. Kings may lift up their heads above the clouds, but they, as well as the rest of mankind, are under the government of God; and such being the case, it is in vain for them arrogantly to struggle to obtain exemption from the obligations of reason. Yet this is what they do. Although tyrants are amongst the basest of men, and occupy their exalted station by detestable treason, yet if any servant of God has the fortitude to open his mouth against them, they immediately attempt to shelter themselves by appealing to the sacred name of God, as if great wrong had been done to them. Thus, whilst they persuade themselves that they are privileged with exemption from the law to which the rest of mankind are subject, they

endeavor to deprive the common people of divine truth and its ministers. In short, they think that there can be no sovereignty unless where uncontrolled license is enjoyed. But let this principle be once established, "That God rules among them," and then a way is opened up for the admission of divine truth. Accordingly, the prophet, after having thus laid a foundation for his authority, freely inveighs against princes, and reproves the very gross vice of selling themselves to those who unrighteously oppress the poor, and of being gained by bribes to pervert in their administration every principle of justice. He expressly names the *wicked*; for good men will never attempt to corrupt judges. Moreover, there is a certain devilish frenzy which infatuates the princes of the world, and leads them voluntarily to pay greater respect to wicked men than to the simple and innocent. Even supposing that the wicked continue inactive, and use no endeavors to obtain for themselves favor either by flattery, fraud, bribery, or other artifices; yet those who bear rule are for the most part inclined of themselves to the bad side. The reason why the prophet upbraids them is, that wicked men find more favor at their hands than the good and conscientious.

**3** *Determine the cause of the poor and the orphan.* We are here briefly taught that a just and well-regulated government will be distinguished for maintaining the rights of the poor and afflicted. By the figure synecdoche, one part of equitable administration is put for the whole; for it cannot be doubted that rulers are bound to observe justice towards all men without distinction. But the prophet, with much propriety, represents them as appointed to be the defenders of the miserable and oppressed, both because such persons stand in need of the assistance of others, and because they can only obtain this where rulers are free from avarice, ambition, and other vices. The end, therefore, for which judges bear the sword is to restrain the wicked, and thus to prevent violence from prevailing among men, who are so much disposed to become disorderly and outrageous. According as men increase in strength, they become proportionally audacious in oppressing the weak; and hence it is that rich men seldom resort to magistrates for help, except when they happen to fall out among themselves. From these remarks, it is very obvious why the cause of the poor and needy is here chiefly commended to rulers; for those who are exposed an easy prey to the cruelty and wrongs of the rich have no less need of the assistance and protection of magistrates than the sick have of the aid of the physician. Were the truth deeply fixed in the minds of kings and other judges, that they are appointed to be the guardians of the poor, and that a special part of this duty lies in resisting the wrongs which are done to them, and in repressing all unrighteous violence, perfect righteousness would become triumphant through the whole world. Whoever thinks it not beneath him to defend the poor, instead of allowing himself to be carried hither and thither by favor, will have a regard only to what is right. We may farther learn from this passage, that although magistrates may not be solicited for succor, they are accounted guilty before God of negligence, if they do not, of their own accord, succor those who stand in need of their interference. When iniquity openly prevails, and when, on account of it, sighs and lamentations are everywhere heard, it is in vain for them to pretend that they cannot redress wrongs, unless complaints are addressed to them. Oppression utters a sufficiently loud cry of itself; and if the judge, sitting on a high watch-tower, seems to take no notice of it, he is here plainly warned, that such connivance shall not escape with impunity.

## Psalm 82:5-8

**5.** They know not, neither do they understand: they walk in darkness, although all the foundations of the earth are moved. **6.** I have said, Ye are gods, and all of you sons of the Most High. **7.** But ye shall die as a man; and ye shall fall, O princes: as one of the people. **8.** Arise, O God! Judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations.

**5** *They know not, neither do they understand.* <sup>425</sup> After having reminded princes of their duty, the Psalmist complains that his admonition from their infatuation is ineffectual, and that they refuse to receive wholesome instruction; yea, that although the whole world is shaken to its foundations, they, notwithstanding, continue thoughtless and secure in the neglect of their duty. He chiefly reprobates and condemns their madness as manifested in this, that although they see heaven and earth involved in confusion, they are no more affected at the sight than if the care of the interests of mankind did not belong to them, of which they are, notwithstanding, in an especial manner the chosen and appointed conservators. I have stated a little before, that what chiefly deprives them of understanding is, that, being dazzled with their own splendor, and perversely shaking off every yoke, no religious considerations have the effect of inclining them to moderation. All sound knowledge and wisdom must commence with yielding to God the honor which is his due, and submitting to be restrained and governed by his word. The last clause of the verse, *Although all the foundations of the earth are moved*, <sup>426</sup> is almost universally understood by interpreters in a different sense from that in which I have rendered it. They explain it as implying, that of all the calamities in the world the greatest is when princes neglect to execute the duties of their office; for it is the observance and prevalence of justice which constitutes the foundation on which the fabric of human society rests. Thus the sense, according to them, is, that the world is undermined and overthrown by the unjust tyranny of princes. I am far from rejecting this interpretation; but, as I have already hinted, I am more inclined to think, that we have here condemned the monstrous stupidity of judges, who can remain indifferent and unmoved in beholding the horrible confusion of civil society, yea even the very earth shaken to its foundations.

**6** *I have said, ye are gods.* God has invested judges with a sacred character and title. This the prophet concedes; but he, at the same time, shows that this will afford no support and protection to wicked judges. He does not introduce them as speaking of the dignity of their office; but anticipating the style of reasoning which they would be disposed to adopt, he replies, "If you appeal to your dignity as an argument to shield you, this boasting will avail you nothing; yea, rather you are deceiving yourselves by your foolish confidence; for God, in appointing you his substitutes, has not divested himself of his own sovereignty as supreme ruler. Again, he would have you to remember your own frailty as a means of stirring you up to execute with fear and trembling the office intrusted to you." This verse may also be viewed as addressed by God himself to rulers, and as intimating, that, in addition to his clothing them with authority, he has bestowed upon them his

<sup>425</sup> "The Psalmist having thus far addressed himself to the administrators of justice, as if wearied with his ineffectual remonstrance, here suddenly turns away and condemns their inattention and perverseness. The change of person is a natural indication of the earnestness of the speaker, and has a lively effect." — *Mant.*

<sup>426</sup> "*All the foundations of the earth*, etc. Rather, *of the land*; that is, truth and justice, the foundation of all good government, and the only security of a state, are now altogether violated or disregarded." — *Warner.*

name. This interpretation seems to agree with the language of Christ in John 10:34, where he speaks of those as called gods to whom the word of God came. The passage, however, may be appropriately resolved thus: *I grant that ye are gods, and the sons of the Most High* <sup>427</sup> But this does not materially alter the meaning. The object is simply to teach that the dignity with which judges are invested can form no excuse or plea why they should escape the punishment which their wickedness deserves. The government of the world has been committed to them upon the distinct understanding that they themselves also must one day appear at the judgment-seat of heaven to render up an account. The dignity, therefore, with which they are clothed is only temporary, and will pass away with the fashion of the world. Accordingly, it is added in the 7th verse, *But ye shall die as men*. You are armed with power, as if he had said, to govern the world; but you have not on that account ceased to be men, so as to be no longer subject to mortality. The last clause of the verse is translated by some expositors, *Ye shall fall like one of the princes*; <sup>428</sup> but in my opinion improperly. They think that it contains a threatening of the violent death which would befall these unrighteous judges, corresponding to the sentiment of these lines of a heathen poet: —

*“Ad generum Cereris sine caede et sanguine pauci,  
Descendunt reges, et sicca morte tyranni.”*

“Few kings and tyrants go down to Pluto, the son-in-law of Ceres, without being put to a violent death, before they have completed the ordinary term allotted to the life of mortal man.” <sup>429</sup> That translation being forced, and not such as the words naturally suggest, I have no doubt that princes are here compared to the obscure and common class of mankind. The word *one* signifies any of the common people. Forgetting themselves to be men, the great ones of the earth may flatter themselves with visionary hopes of immortality; but they are here taught that they will be compelled to encounter death as well as other men. Christ, with the view of rebutting the calumny with which the Pharisees loaded him, quoted this text, John 10:34, 35, “Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken; say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?” By these words Christ did not mean to place himself among the order of judges; but he argues from the less to the greater, that if the name of God is applied to God’s officers, it with much more propriety belongs to his only begotten Son, who is the express image of the Father, in whom the Father’s majesty shines forth, and in whom the whole fullness of the Godhead dwells.

**8** *Arise, O God! judge the earth.* The reason why this psalm concludes with a prayer has been already stated at the commencement. The prophet, finding that his admonitions and remonstrances were ineffectual, and that princes, inflated with pride, treated with contempt all instruction on the principles of equity, addresses himself to God, and calls upon Him to repress their insolence. By

<sup>427</sup> “*Ye are all the children of the Most High*, an Hebrew idiom, signifying men of the highest rank and power. Comp. Psalm 29:1; 89:7.” — *Cresswell*.

<sup>428</sup> This is the reading in our English Bible, on which Archbishop Secker remarks, “It seems needless to say that these princes shall fall like one of the princes.” He thinks with Bishop Hare that the true reading is not *hassarim, the princes*, as in our present copies, but *harsaim, the poor*. The translation, however, given by Calvin, who takes *hassarim* in the vocative case, *O ye princes!* and who, after the word *hassarim*, *cheachad*, for *as one of*, supplies *the people*, makes any alteration of the text unnecessary. Gataker also considers *hassarim*, to be in the vocative case, which is approved by Horsley, Berlin, and others. Dathe takes *hassarim* in the sense of *tyrants*, but brings no authority to prove that the word has this sense. Le Clerc, in the latter part of the verse, after *like one of*, supplies *the many*, reading, “And fall, O ye princes! like one of the many.”

<sup>429</sup> This is the translation given of these lines in the French version.

this means, the Holy Spirit furnishes us with ground of comfort whenever we are cruelly treated by tyrants. We may perceive no power on earth to restrain their excesses; but it becomes us to lift up our eyes to heaven, and to seek redress from Him whose office it is to judge the world, and who does not claim this office to himself in vain. It is therefore our bounden duty to beseech him to restore to order what is embroiled in confusion. The reason of this which immediately follows — *for thou shalt inherit all nations* — is understood by some as a prophecy concerning the kingdom of Christ, by whom God has brought all nations in subjection to himself. But it is to be viewed in a more extensive sense, as implying that God has a rightful claim to the obedience of all nations, and that tyrants are chargeable with wickedly and unjustly wresting from him his prerogative of bearing rule, when they set at nought his authority, and confound good and evil, right and wrong. We ought therefore to beseech him to restore to order the confusions of the world, and thus to recover the rightful dominion which he has over it.



# PSALM 83

The prophet implores the divine aid against the enemies of the Church, and, as an argument for obtaining this the more easily, he enumerates the many nations which had conspired together for the express purpose of exterminating the people of Israel, and thereby extinguishing the very name of the Church of God. To stir up himself and others to greater earnestness and confidence in prayer, he shows, by many examples, how mightily God had been wont to succor his servants.

*A Song or Psalm of Asaph.*

## Psalm 83:1-4

**1.** O God! keep not silence with thyself; hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God! **2.** For, behold! Thy enemies are tumultuous: and those who hate thee have lifted up the head. **3.** They have formed a crafty design against thy people, and have consulted against thy hidden ones. **4.** They have said, Come and let us cut them off from being a nation; and let the name of Israel be no more remembered.

**1** *O God! hold not thy peace.* It is very generally agreed among commentators, that this psalm was composed during the reign of king Jehoshaphat; and in this opinion I readily concur. That godly king, as is well known, had to engage in dreadful wars against multiplied hosts of enemies. Although the Ammonites and Moabites were the originators of the principal war in which he was engaged, yet they mustered forces not only from Syria, but also from distant countries, and the troops thus brought together well nigh overwhelmed Judea with their multitude. It would then appear, from the long list of enemies, here enumerated, who had conspired together to destroy the people of God, that the conjecture is well-founded which refers the composition of this psalm to that occasion;<sup>430</sup> and sacred history informs us, that one of the Levites, under the influence of the Spirit of prophecy, gave the king assurance of victory,<sup>431</sup> and that the Levites sang before the Lord. In the midst of so great dangers, the whole nation, as well as the holy king, must have been involved in the deepest distress; and, accordingly, we have here a prayer full of earnestness and solicitude. These feelings prompted the repetition of the words which occur in the very opening of the psalm, *Hold not thy peace, Keep not silence, be not still* By this, the faithful would intimate, that if God intended to succor them, it behoved him to make haste, else the opportunity for doing so would be lost. It is unquestionably our duty to wait patiently when God at any time delays his help; but, in condescension to our infirmity, he permits us to supplicate him to make haste. What I have rendered, *keep not silence with thyself*, is literally *keep not silence to thyself*, which some translate by the paraphrase, *Hold not thy peace in thy own cause*, — an exposition which is too refined to be more particularly noticed. This form of expression is equivalent to saying, *Hold not thyself in*. Perhaps the particle is here superfluous, as it is in many other places.

**2** *For, behold! thy enemies are tumultuous.* As an argument for enforcing the prayer of the preceding verse, it is affirmed that the faithful are oppressed both by the impetuous violence and

<sup>430</sup> Compare the 6th, 7th, and 8th verses of the psalm with 2 Chronicles 20:1, 10, 22; and the 12th verse of the psalm with the 11th verse of that chapter.

<sup>431</sup> The name of this Levite was Jahaziel, and he is expressly said to be a prophet of the race of Asaph, 2 Chronicles 20:14. It is not unlikely that he is the same with Asaph, the author of this psalm.

the crafty policy of their enemies, which, to all human appearance, rendered their escape from death utterly hopeless. When it is said that *they are tumultuous* and *lift up the head*, the meaning is, that relying upon their own power, they behave themselves insolently and proudly. By this conduct on the part of their enemies, the minds of the people of God are greatly depressed, and the only way in which they can obtain relief, is by making their moan to Him whose continual work it is to repress the proud. When, therefore, the saints implore his aid, it is their ordinary course to lay before him the perverseness of their enemies. It is worthy of notice, that those who molest the Church are called *the enemies of God*.

It affords us no small ground of confidence that those who are our enemies are also God's enemies. This is one of the fruits of his free and gracious covenant, in which he has promised to be an enemy to all our enemies, — a promise for which there is good cause, when it is considered that the welfare of his people, whom he has taken under his protection, cannot be assailed without an injury being, at the same time done to his own majesty. Meanwhile, let us live at peace with all men, as much as in us lies, and let us endeavor to practice uprightness in our whole deportment, that we may be able confidently to appeal to God, that when we suffer at the hands of men, we suffer wrongfully. The pride and violent assaults of our enemies may be combined with craftiness. But when such is the case, it becomes us to yield to God the honor which belongs to him, by resting satisfied that He can succor us; for to break the proud who foam out their rage, and to take the crafty in their own craftiness, is work which He has been accustomed to perform in all ages. To keep us from thinking that we are abandoned to the snares and traps of our enemies, the prophet here seasonably sets before us a consideration calculated to administer the highest consolation and hope, when he calls us *God's hidden ones*. This expression is understood by some as meaning that the aid and protection which God extends to us, is not apparent to the eye of sense and reason; just as it is said elsewhere of the life of the people of God, that it is *hid*, (Colossians 3:3.) But this interpretation is too forced, and altogether inconsistent both with the scope of the passage and the natural construction of the words. The design of them is simply to teach that we are hidden under the shadow of God's wings; for although to outward appearance we lie open, and are exposed to the will of the wicked and the proud, we are preserved by the hidden power of God.<sup>432</sup> Accordingly, it is said in another Psalm, (27:5,)

“In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me.” (Psalm 27:5)

It is, however, at the same time to be observed, that none are hid under the keeping and protection of God but those who, renouncing all dependence on their own strength, betake themselves with fear and trembling to Him. Such as under the influence of a flattering belief in the sufficiency of their own strength to resist, boldly enter the conflict, and, as if devoid of all fear, wax wanton, will ultimately suffer the consequences which result from inadequate resources.<sup>433</sup> We will then best

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<sup>432</sup> The Hebrew word translated *thy hidden ones*, primarily means a *treasure*, and is so taken in Psalm 17:14. Accordingly, it is here rendered by Mudge, and French and Skinner, “thy treasured ones:” that is, thy peculiar people: those whom thou hast hitherto protected and kept in perfect safety, as in a place of security and secrecy. The Septuagint reads, *κατὰ τῶν ἁγίων σου*, “against thy saints.” The word is also sometimes put for the sanctuary, as in Ezekiel 7:22. Some therefore think that the temple, and the treasures contained in it, are intended.

<sup>433</sup> “Ils sentiront à la fin a leur grande honte, qu'ils estoient desnuer de toute vertu.” — *Fr.* “Will at length find, to their great shame, that they were destitute of all power.”

consult our own safety by taking shelter under the shadow of the Almighty, and, conscious of our own weakness, committing our salvation to him, casting it, so to speak, into his bosom.

**4** *They have said, Come and let us cut them off from being a nation.* The wickedness of these hostile powers is aggravated from the circumstance, that it was their determined purpose utterly to exterminate the Church. This may be restricted to the Ammonites and Moabites, who were as bellows to blow up the flame in the rest. But the Hagarenes, the Syrians, and the other nations, being by their instigation affected with no less hatred and fury against the people of God, for whose destruction they had taken up arms, we may justly consider this vaunting language as uttered by the whole of the combined host; for having entered into a mutual compact they rushed forward with rival eagerness, and encouraged one another to destroy the kingdom of Judah. The prime agent in exciting such cruel hatred was doubtless Satan, who has all along from the beginning been exerting himself to extinguish the Church of God, and who, for this purpose, has never ceased to stir up his own children to outrage. The phrase, *to cut them off from being a nation*, signifies to exterminate them root and branch, and thus to put an end to them as a nation or people. That this is the meaning is more clearly evinced from the second clause of the verse, *Let the name of Israel be no more remembered* The compassion of God would in no small degree be excited by the circumstance that this war was not undertaken, as wars commonly have been, to bring them, when conquered, under the power of their enemies; but the object which the cruelty of their enemies aimed at was their entire destruction. And what did this amount to but to an attempt to overthrow the decree of God on which the perpetual duration of the Church depends.

## Psalm 83:5-8

**5.** For they have consulted with the heart together; they have entered into a covenant<sup>434</sup> against thee. **6.** The tents of Edom,<sup>435</sup> and the Ishmaelites<sup>436</sup> Moab<sup>437</sup> and the Hagarenes.<sup>438</sup> **7.** Gebal,<sup>439</sup>

<sup>434</sup> The Hebrew is *berith yichrothu*, "they have cut a covenant." The verb is from *carath*, *he cut*, which, with the noun, *berith*, signifies *to strike a league*, or *to covenant* The phrase owes its origin to the custom which prevailed, in ancient times, of sacrificing an animal at the forming of solemn leagues, and dividing the victim in twain, the contracting parties passing between the two pieces; see volume 2, page 264, note. It is then affirmed of these combined enemies of the Jews, that *they had cut the covenant sacrifice*; that they had slain a sacrificial victim, divided it in twain, and passed between the pieces' thus mutually binding themselves to accomplish their hostile purpose.

<sup>435</sup> That is, the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, (Genesis 25:30.) They were a pastoral people, and made great use of tents.

<sup>436</sup> The Ishmaelites were the descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's son, by Hagar the Egyptian, (Genesis 25:12-18.) They inhabited part of Arabia.

<sup>437</sup> That is, the Moabites, the descendants of Moab, a son of Lot, by one of his daughters, (Genesis 19:37.)

<sup>438</sup> The Hagarenes or Hagarites were the posterity of Abraham by Keturah, (who is supposed to have been Hagar,) whom he married after Sarah's death. They dwelt on the east of Gilead, in the vicinity of the Euphrates. In the days of Saul war was made upon them by the Reubenites, who, after having nearly destroyed them and expelled them from their country, dwelt in their tents, (1 Chronicles 5:10.) They seem again to have recruited their strength; but where they afterwards dwelt is not known. "They are probably the same," says Cresswell, "as the Saracens."

<sup>439</sup> Gebal, which signifies a mountain, denotes, according to some, the Giblites, who inhabited a district on the Phoenician coast in the neighborhood of Tyre. They were a tribe of the Aborigines of Canaan, and are mentioned as left by Joshua to be conquered after his death, (Joshua 13:5.) They were of considerable service to Hiram, king of Tyre, in preparing materials for Solomon's temple, as we learn from 1 Kings 5:18, where the original word for *stone-squarers* is *haggibelim*, *the Giblites*; and it would seem from Ezekiel's speaking of "the ancients of Gebal and the wise men thereof," (Ezekiel 27:9,) that they rose to no small degree of eminence. The ruins of an ancient city called by the natives Gibyle, situated upon the Mediterranean Sea

and Ammon, <sup>440</sup> and Amalek <sup>441</sup> the Philistines with the inhabitants of Tyre. **8.** Assur is also associated with them: they have been an arm to the sons of Lot. Selah.

**5** *For they have consulted with the heart together.* The multiplied hosts which united their powers together to oppose the Church of God and to effect her overthrow, are here enumerated. As so many nations, formed into one powerful confederacy, were bent on the destruction of a kingdom not greatly distinguished by its power, the miraculous aid of God was indispensably necessary for the deliverance of a people who, in such extremity, were altogether unable to defend themselves. In circumstances apparently as hopeless good king Asa gave utterance to that truly magnanimous reflection:

“Lord, it is nothing with thee to help whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God! for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitudes”  
(1 Chronicles 14:11.)

The same Spirit who inspired that pious king with such invincible fortitude dictated this psalm for the benefit of the whole Church, to encourage her with unhesitating confidence to betake herself to God for aid. And in our own day he sets before us these words, in order that no danger or difficulty may prevent us from calling upon God. When the whole world may conspire together against us, we have as it were a wall of brass for the defense of Christ’s kingdom in these words, “Why do the heathen rage?” etc., (Psalm 2:1.)

It will be in no small degree profitable to us to contemplate this as an example in which we have represented to us, as in a mirror what has been the lot of the Church of God from the beginning. This, if rightly reflected upon, will keep us at the present day from being unduly dejected when we witness the whole world in array against us. We see how the Pope has inflamed the whole world against us with diabolical rage. Hence it is, that in whatever direction we turn our eyes, we meet with just so many hostile armies to destroy us. But when we have once arrived at a settled persuasion that no strange thing happens to us, the contemplation of the condition of the Church in old time will strengthen us for continuing in the exercise of patience until God suddenly display his power, which is perfectly able, without any created aid, to frustrate all the attempts of the world.

To remove from the minds of the godly all misgivings as to whether help is ready to be imparted to them from heaven, the prophet distinctly affirms that those who molest the Church are chargeable with making war against God, who has taken her under his protection. The principle upon which God declares that he will be our helper is contained in these words,

“He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye,”  
(Zechariah 2:8.)

And what is said in another psalm concerning the patriarchs, is equally applicable to all true believers,

“Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm,”

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between Tripoli and Sidon, are supposed to be those of the chief city of the Gibrilites. If so, these ruins attest its ancient grandeur to have been considerable. Others suppose that Gebal (the Gebalene of the Romans) was a mountainous district inhabited by the Edomites, and extending from the Dead Sea southward to Selal or Petra. By the Arabs it is called Djebal.

<sup>440</sup> That is, the Ammonites, the descendants of Ammon, another of Lot’s sons, by one of his daughters, (Genesis 19:38.) They dwelt in Arabia Petrea.

<sup>441</sup> The Amalekites were a powerful people, who dwelt also in Arabia Petrea, between the Dead Sea and the Red Sea, or between Havilah and Shur, (1 Samuel 15:7,) south of Idumea, and east of the northern part of the Red Sea.

(Psalm 105:15.)

He will have the anointing with which he has anointed us to be, as it were, a buckler to keep us in perfect safety. The nations here enumerated did not avowedly make war against him; but as, when he sees his servants unrighteously assaulted, he interposes himself between them and their enemies to bear the blows aimed at them, they are here justly represented as *having entered into a league against God*. The case is analogous to that of the Papists in the present day. If any were to ask them, when they hold consultations for the express purpose of accomplishing our destruction, Whether they were stronger than God? they would immediately reply, That they had no intention whatever of assaulting heaven in imitation of the giants of old. But God having declared that every injury which is done to us is an assault upon him, we may, as from a watch-tower, behold in the distance by the eye of faith the approach of that destruction of which the votaries of Antichrist shall have at length the sad and melancholy experience.

The expression, *to consult with the heart*, is by some explained, *to deliberate with the greatest exertion and earnestness of mind*. Thus it is quite common for us to say, that a thing is done with the heart which is done with earnestness and ardor of mind. But this expression is rather intended to denote the hidden crafty devices complained of a little before.

Some interpreters refer *the tents of Edom* to warlike furniture, and understand the words as meaning, that these enemies came well equipped and provided with tents for prolonging the war; but the allusion seems rather to be to the custom which prevailed among those nations of dwelling in tents. It is, however, a hyperbolical form of expression; as if it had been said, So great was their eagerness to engage in this war, that they might be said even to pluck their tents from the places where they were pitched.

I do not intend to enter curiously into a discussion concerning the respective nations here named, the greater part of them being familiarly known from the frequency with which they are spoken of in the sacred Scriptures. When it is said that Assur and the rest were *an arm to the sons of Lot*, this is evidently an additional aggravation of the wickedness of the sons of Lot. It would have been an act of unnatural cruelty for them to have aided foreign nations against their own kindred. But when they themselves are the first to sound the trumpet, and when of their own suggestion they invite the aid of the Assyrians and other nations to destroy their own brethren, ought not such barbarous inhumanity to call forth the deepest detestation? Josephus himself records, that the Israelites had passed through their borders without doing them any harm, sparing their own blood according to the express command of God. When the Moabites and Ammonites then knew that their brethren the Jews spared them, remembering that they were of the same blood, and sprung from one common parentage, ought they not also to have reciprocated so much kindness on their part as not to have embarked in any hostile enterprise against them? But it is, as it were, the destiny of the Church, not only to be assailed by external enemies, but to suffer far greater trouble at the hands of false brethren. At the present day, none are more furiously mad against us than counterfeit Christians.

## Psalm 83:9-12

**9.** Do to them as to the Midianites, <sup>442</sup> as to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the brook Kishon. <sup>443</sup> **10.** They perished at Endor; they became manure for the earth. **11.** Make them and their princes like Oreb, and like Zeeb; <sup>444</sup> and like Zebah, and like Zalmunna, <sup>445</sup> all their princes. **12.** Who have said, Let us take in possession for ourselves the habitations of God.

**9.** *Do to them as to the Midianites.* The faithful, having complained of the very grievous oppressions to which they were subjected, with the view of inducing God the more readily to succor them, now call to their remembrance the many occasions on which he had afforded relief to his people, when brought into the most desperate circumstances. From this, it is an obvious inference, that God wisely delays his aid to his servants under oppression, that when they seem to be reduced to the last extremity, he may appear in a miraculous manner for their succor. The prophet, in this verse, mingles together two histories. Strict accuracy would have required him to have said in one connected sentence, *Do to them as to the Midianites at the brook Kishon.* But he inserts in the middle of this sentence, the slaughter of Jabin and Sisera. It was, however, of no great importance to distinguish particularly between the two histories. He considered it enough for his purpose, to bring to the remembrance of himself and other pious Jews, the miracles which God in the days of old had so often wrought in delivering his people. The great object aimed at is to show, that God, who had so often put his enemies to flight, and rescued his poor trembling sheep out of the jaws of wolves, was not now without the power of effecting the same deliverance. The wonderful manner in which he succoured his people by the hand of Gideon is well known: Judges 6 and 7; It might have seemed altogether ridiculous for Gideon to venture to engage in battle against a very powerful army, with no greater a number of men of war than three hundred, and these, be it observed, such as had been in a state of bondage during their whole lives, and whom the mere look of their lords might have thrown into consternation. And yet, it came to pass, that the Midianites perished by turning their swords against each other. The same goodness God displayed in the slaughter of Sisera and king Jabin, Judges 4:13. Barak, under the conduct of a woman, Deborah, discomfited them both, when, with a small handful of soldiers, he intrepidly gave battle to their mighty host. And Sisera, the general of the army, did not die bravely on the field of battle, but was smitten by the hand of a woman after he had retired to some hiding-place. That the faithful may not be overwhelmed with terror and fall into despair, they seasonably fortify themselves with these examples of deliverance, by which God had shown that in himself alone there resides a sufficiency of power to defend his people, whenever, destitute of the resources of human aid, they should betake themselves to him. From that astonishing and unwonted mode of granting deliverance, they came to the conclusion, that he is a wonderful worker in preserving his Church; in order to encourage themselves to entertain the fullest confidence, that in his breath alone they would have sufficient strength to overthrow all their enemies. Nor is it only in this passage that the slaughter of the Midianites is related for this purpose. Isaiah also (Isaiah 9:4) introduces it for confirming the truth of the Church's

<sup>442</sup> The Midianites derive their name from Midian, the son of Abraham, by Keturah, Genesis 25:2. The history here referred to is the complete defeat of that people by Gideon, Judges 7:21, 23.

<sup>443</sup> *Kishon* is a torrent which flows from mount Tabor into the sea.

<sup>444</sup> *Oreb and Zeeb* were two chiefs or generals of the Midianites, and were slain by the men of Ephraim in their pursuit of the Midianites, Judges 7:24, 25.

<sup>445</sup> *Zebah and Zalmunna* were kings of Midian, whom Gideon, after having defeated their army, took prisoners and put to death, Judges 8:10-21.

restitution: “For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian.” When it is stated that *they became manure for the earth*, the expression may be explained as meaning, either, first, that their carcasses lay rotting upon the earth; or, secondly, that they were trampled under foot as manure. This latter exposition is the most appropriate; but I do not reject the former. The reason why it is said, *They perished at Endor*, it is somewhat difficult to ascertain. The name, *Endor*, is to be found in Joshua 17:11; and it is probable, that the army of king Jabin was destroyed there.<sup>446</sup> The opinion entertained by some, that *Endor* is here used as an appellative, conveying the idea that their discomfiture was open and visible to the eye, is what I cannot approve.

**12.** *Who have said, Let us take in possession for ourselves the habitations of God.* These heathen enemies are again accused of treason against the King of heaven, in seizing upon his heritage like lawless robbers. They would not, we may be sure, avow in so many words that it was their intention to commit such a crime; but as they despised God, who, as they well knew, was worshipped by the people of Israel, they are here justly charged with the guilt of endeavoring to dispossess Him of his own inheritance. And, without doubt, they profanely poured abuse upon the true God, of whose sacred majesty they entertained the greatest contempt, their minds being besotted with their own inventions. But even granting that they abstained from gross blasphemies, yet whatever harassing proceedings are carried on against the godly redound to the dishonor of God, who has taken them under his protection. The appellation, *the habitations or mansions of God*, which is applied to Judea, is a form of expression, containing no small degree of comfort. God has united himself to us, with the view of having an everlasting residence amongst us, or rather that he may set as high a value upon his Church, and account it as precious, as a householder does his possessions which are most valuable, and yield him a large revenue.

## Psalm 83:13-18

<sup>446</sup> Endor is not mentioned in the account given of the discomfiture of Jabin’s host, and the slaughter of Sisera, in Judges 4; but it appears from Joshua 17:11, which Calvin quotes, to have been a part of the portion which fell to the tribe of Manasseh. In that passage, Taanach and Megiddo are mentioned as districts adjoining to Endor. And in the song of Deborah, the kings of Canaan who fought on the occasion referred to, against the Israelites, are said to have fought “in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo,” Judges 5:19. This may explain why they are said to have perished at Endor, which was near the place where Sisera’s army were destroyed.

**13.** O my God! make them like a whirling ball, <sup>447</sup> like stubble before the wind. **14.** As fire burns a forest <sup>448</sup> and as the flame kindles the mountains, <sup>449</sup> **15.** So pursue them with thy tempest, <sup>450</sup> and terrify them with thy whirlwind. **16.** Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek thy name, O Jehovah! **17.** Let them be ashamed, and terrified perpetually, and let them be confounded, and perish. **18.** And let them know that thou art, thy name Jehovah, thou alone the Most High over all the earth. <sup>451</sup>

**13.** *O my God! make them like a whirling ball.* As the ungodly, when they gird and prepare themselves for destroying the Church, are usually inflated with intolerable pride, the inspired bard beseeches God to put them to shame, it being impossible to abate their pride until they are laid prostrate, confounded, and shamefully disappointed. When he declares (verse 16) that, as the result of this, *they will seek the name of God*, he is not to be understood as speaking of their being brought to true repentance, or of their genuine conversion. I indeed admit that the first step to genuine repentance is when men, brought low by affliction, willingly humble themselves. But what is here meant is nothing more than a forced and slavish submission like that of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. It is a case of frequent occurrence for the wicked, when subdued by adversity, to give glory to God, for a short period. But they are soon again carried away with a frantic madness, which clearly discovers their hypocrisy, and brings to light the pride and rebellion which lurked in their hearts. What the prophet desires is, that the wicked may be compelled by stripes to acknowledge God, whether they will or no, in order that their fury, which breaks forth because they escape with impunity, may at least be kept under restraint. This is more clearly apparent from the 17th verse, where he distinctly prays that they may be destroyed for ever; which would not at all correspond with his previous statement, were it regarded as a prayer for their being brought to repentance. Nor does he needlessly heap together such a multiplicity of words. He does this partly because the reprobate, though often chastised, are nevertheless so incorrigible that ever and anon they are mustering up new strength and courage; and partly because there is nothing which it is more difficult to be persuaded of than that such as wallow at ease in great outward prosperity will soon perish.

<sup>447</sup> “Globum,” — Lat “Une boule,” — Fr The word , *galeggal*, thus translated, is interpreted by Lowth, “any light thing whirled by the wind, chaff, thistle-down, etc.” “ seems here,” says Archbishop Secker, “especially on comparing Isaiah 17:13, to be not a wheel, but some light matter, which the wind whirls round and blows away; *chaff*.” In that passage of Isaiah, where the same Hebrew word occurs, the rendering in our English Bible is “a rolling thing;” and the marginal reading, “thistle-down.” This verse affords a striking exhibition of the nothingness of combined nations before the Almighty. He can make them “like the thistle-down; like the stubble before the wind.”

<sup>448</sup> The allusion in this verse is to the fires, either accidental or designed, which frequently occur in hot and wooded countries, and which spread to a vast extent, devouring all before them, and continuing their ravages for a long time. Many Eastern and African travelers describe these formidable and alarming fires from personal observation; and such descriptions serve to give a more adequate idea than would otherwise offer itself to an European mind of the Psalmist’s meaning. This language is an expressive image for wide and quick destruction.

<sup>449</sup> “Kindleth the mountains, that is, the produce of the mountains, trees, plants, etc.” — *Walford*.

<sup>450</sup> “Pursue them with thy tempest, is an evident reference to the dissipation of the chaff, and what follows relates clearly to the expansion of the flame.” — Note of Henley, in *Lowth’s Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, volume 1, page 277.

<sup>451</sup> “The construction of the words in the close of the psalm lies most probably thus, , and they shall know, i e., it shall be known by this means, , thou art thy name Jehovah, i e., that thou art what thy name Jehovah imports; and what that is, is expounded in the remainder of the verse, , thou only the Most High over all the earth; that being indeed the meaning of Jehovah, the infinite, eternal, and so the only supreme power over all the world.” — *Hammond*



The cause to which this is to be attributed is just our not sufficiently apprehending the dreadful character of the vengeance of God which awaits the oppressors of the Church.

**18.** *And let them know that thou art, thy name Jehovah.* It is not the saving knowledge of God which is here spoken of, but that acknowledgement of him which his irresistible power extorts from the wicked. It is not simply said that they will know that there is a God; but a special kind of knowledge is laid down, it being intimated that the heathen who before held the true religion in contempt, would at length perceive that the God who made himself known in the Law, and who was worshipped in Judea, was the only true God. Still, however, it must be remembered, that the knowledge spoken of is only that which is of an evanescent character, having neither root nor the living juice to nourish it; for the wicked will not submit to God willingly and cordially, but are drawn by compulsion to yield a counterfeit obedience, or, being restrained by him, dare not break forth into open outrage. This, then, is an experimental recognition of God which penetrates not to the heart, but is extorted from them by force and necessity. The pronoun *atah, thou*, is emphatic, implying a tacit contrast between the God of Israel and all the false gods which were the product of men's invention. The prayer amounts to this: Lord, make them to know that the idols which they have fabricated for themselves are no gods, and in fact are nothing. The despisers of God may indeed shun the light, and at one time may overcast themselves with clouds, while at another their may plunge into the deep and thick shades of darkness; but He pursues them, and draws them forth to the knowledge of himself, which they would fain bury in ignorance. And as the world indiscriminately and disgracefully applies his sacred name to its own trifling inventions, this profanation is corrected when it is added, *thy name Jehovah*. This implies that *being, or really to be*, is in the strict sense applicable to God alone; for although unbelievers may attempt to tear his glory to pieces, he continues perfect and unchanged. The contrast of which I have spoken, must be kept in mind by the reader. A nation has never existed so barbarous as not to have worshipped some deity; but every country forged particular gods for itself. And although the Moabites, the Edomites, and the rest of these nations, admitted that some power and authority belonged to the God of Israel, yet they conceived that this power and authority did not extend beyond the boundaries of Judea. Thus the king of Syria called him, "the God of the hills," (1 Kings 20:23.) This preposterous and absurd division of God's glory, which men make, is disproved by one word, and all the superstitions which at that time prevailed in the world are overthrown, when the Prophet attributes to the God of Israel, as well the essence of Deity as the name; for unless all the idols of the heathen are completely abolished, he will not obtain, alone and unshared, the name of Jehovah. Accordingly, it is added, *Thou alone art the Most High over all the earth*; a statement which is worthy of our most careful attention. The superstitious commonly think it enough to leave God his name, that is to say, two or three syllables; and in the meantime they fritter away his power, as if his majesty were contained in an empty title. Let us then remember that God does not receive that honor among men to which he is entitled, if he is not allowed to possess his own inherent sovereignty, and if his glory is obscured by setting up other objects against him with antagonist claims.

# PSALM 84

The Psalmist complains that nothing proved to him a source of greater distress than his being prevented from coming to the tabernacle, and his being banished from the assembly of the saints, where God was called upon. And yet he shows, that nothing can withstand the longing desires of the godly; and that, surmounting all obstacles, they will be constantly engaged in seeking God, and, so to speak, will make a way for themselves where there is none.<sup>452</sup> At length he expresses his desire to be restored to the tabernacle of God, and again testifies that a day spent in the tabernacle was in his estimation more to be prized<sup>453</sup> than to live for a long time in the society of unbelievers.

*To the chief musician upon Gittith. A Psalm of<sup>454</sup> the sons of Korah.*<sup>455</sup>

The title of this psalm does not bear the name of David; but as its subject-matter is applicable to him, he was in all probability its author. Some think that it was composed by the sons of Korah, for his particular use; but to prove the groundlessness of this opinion, it is only necessary to advert to this one consideration, that David in his time was so eminently distinguished by the gift of prophecy as to be under no necessity of employing the Levites to perform a service for which he himself was so well qualified. The only difficulty to our ascribing it to David is, that mention is made of mount Zion, to which the ark of the covenant was not brought until he was put in peaceable possession of the kingdom. how after that, he was never deprived of the liberty of appearing before the ark with others, except once, and then only for a short time; namely, when he was under the necessity of betaking himself to flight on account of the rebellion raised against him by his son Absalom.<sup>456</sup> The contents of the psalm, however, indicate, that at the time of its composition, he had been compelled to wander long in different places as an exile. If we reflect that David recorded in psalms the persecutions he endured under Saul long after he was delivered from them, we will not be surprised to find him making mention of Zion in connection with them. Of the word *Gittith*, I have already spoken on the eighth psalm.

## Psalm 84:1-4

**1.** How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Jehovah of Hosts! **2.** My soul longeth, [or greatly desireth,] yea, even fainteth after the courts of Jehovah: my heart and my flesh leap for joy towards

<sup>452</sup> “Mais au contraire que par dessus tous empeschemens ils poursuyvront constamment a chercher Dieu, et par maniere de dire, se feront voye la ou il n’y en a point.” — *Fr.*

<sup>453</sup> “Il tesmoigne derechef qu’il estime plus de jouyer de ceste liberte d’assister avec les autres au tabernacle de Dieu, quand mesme il ne devroit vivre qu’un jour, etc.” — *Fr.* “He again testifies, that to enjoy the liberty of assisting with others at the tabernacle of God for only one day was, in his estimation, more to be prized, etc.”

<sup>454</sup> “It is admitted that the Hebrew preposition here used (*lamed*) may be translated either *by*, *to*, or *for*. When applied to an individual, we consider it as marking the author by whom it was written, or the musician to whose care it was addressed, for adapting it to music. But when addressed to a company of choristers, as the sons of Korah, there seems no doubt but it was intended for them to sing it.” — *Williams.*

<sup>455</sup> The sons of Korah were the descendants of Korah, whom the earth swallowed up for striving against Moses and against the Lord. In the narrative of that event, we are informed that “the children of Korah died not,” (Numbers 26:10.) They joined not with their father in his sedition, and therefore escaped his punishment. It appears from 1 Chronicles 9:19, and 26:1-19, that their posterity were employed as porters or keepers of the tabernacle and temple. They had also a place among the singers of the temple, (2 Chronicles 20:19.) Their name occurs in the title of nine psalms.

<sup>456</sup> “Or est-il, que depuis ce temps-la, il ne perdit jamais la liberte de pouvoir comparoistre devant l’Arche avec les autres, si non une fois et pour bien peu de temps, c’est ascavoir quand il s’enfuit pour la persecution que luy faisoit son fils.” — *Fr.*

the living God. **3.** The sparrow also hath found a house for herself, and the swallow <sup>457</sup> a nest for herself, where she may place her young ones, O thine altars! Thou Jehovah of Hosts! my King, and my God. **4.** Blessed are they who dwell in thy house: they will be ever praising thee. Selah.

**1** *How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Jehovah of Hosts!* David complains of his being deprived of liberty of access to the Church of God, there to make a profession of his faith, to improve in godliness, and to engage in the divine worship. Some would understand by the *tabernacles of God*, the kingdom of heaven, as if David mourned over his continuance in this state of earthly pilgrimage; but they do not sufficiently consider the nature of his present afflicted circumstances — that he was debarred from the sanctuary. He knew that God had not in vain appointed the holy assemblies, and that the godly have need of such helps so long as they are sojourners in this world. He was also deeply sensible of his own infirmity; nor was he ignorant how far short he came of approaching the perfection of angels. He had therefore good ground to lament over his being deprived of those means, the utility of which is well known to all true believers. His attention was, no doubt, directed to the proper end for which the external ritual was appointed; for his character was widely different from that of hypocrites, who, while they frequent the solemn assemblies with great pomp, and seem to burn with ardent zeal in serving God, yet in all this, aim at nothing more than by an ostentatious display of piety to obtain the credit of having performed their duty towards Him. David's mind was far from being occupied with this gross imagination. The end he had in view in desiring so earnestly to enjoy free access to the sanctuary was, that he might there worship God with sincerity of heart, and in a spiritual manner. The opening words are in the form of an exclamation, which is an indication of ardent affection; and this state of feeling is expressed still more fully in the second verse. Hence we learn, that those are sadly deficient in understanding who carelessly neglect God's instituted worship, as if they were able to mount up to heaven by their own unaided efforts.

I have observed, that in the second verse a more than ordinary ardor of desire is expressed. The first verb, *casaph*, signifies *vehemently to desire*; but not contented with this word, David adds, that *his soul fainteth after the courts of the Lord*, which is equivalent to our pining away, when, under the influence of extreme mental emotion, we are in a manner transported out of ourselves. He speaks only of the *courts* of the tabernacle, because, not being a priest, it was not lawful for him to go beyond the outer court. None but the priests, as is well known, were permitted to enter into the inner sanctuary. In the close of the verse, he declares, that this longing extended itself even

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<sup>457</sup> Bochart supposes *שׁוֹרֵף*, to signify not the *swallow*, but some kind of wild *dove*; as he observes, that the Æthiopic version renders it the *ring-dove*, and the Septuagint, Vulgate, Chaldee, Syriac, and other ancient versions, the *turtle*. These last probably render it *turtle* from the resemblance of the name to *שׁוֹרֵף*, *tur*, the common name of that bird. Merrick, in his version, translated it at first *turtle*, but afterwards substituted the more comprehensive name of *dove* instead of turtle, at the suggestion of Dr Lowth. "You have very good authorities for the *turtle*," says that learned Prelate: "my objection may be merely an English one. The bird which we know by that name is of all others the most retired and shyest; and hardly ever approaches any building, much less makes her nest in any frequented place. Does not this consideration render it an unfit image for the Psalmist's purpose here? The *dove*, which is only a more general name for the same bird, would not be liable to this objection." But to remove that difficulty relating to the turtle, Merrick quotes a passage from Sir H. Blunt's *Voyage to the Levant*, (page 186, ed. 5) in which that traveler says, that in Turkey, all birds are so tame from not being used to violence, that he had thrown his coat upon *turtle-doves* in the highway. "The Hebrew interpreters," says the *Illustrated Commentary upon the Bible*, "believe it is the swallow, and are followed by our version. The word means *freedom, deliverance*, and may be supposed to refer to the free manner in which the swallow flies. It is only mentioned again, at least by this name, in Proverbs 26:2; and is there also associated with the *tsippor*, which our version there renders *bird*, instead of *sparrow*. In both texts, the meaning agrees better with the swallow than the turtle-dove."

to his body, that is, it manifested itself in the utterance of the mouth, the languor of the eyes, and the action of the hands. The reason why he longed so intensely to have access to the tabernacle was, to enjoy *the living God*; not that he conceived of God as shut up in so narrow a place as was the tent of the ark,<sup>458</sup> but he was convinced of the need he had of steps, by which to rise up to heaven, and knew that the visible sanctuary served the purpose of a ladder, because, by it the minds of the godly were directed and conducted to the heavenly model. And assuredly, when we consider that the sluggishness of our flesh hinders us from elevating our minds to the height of the divine majesty, in vain would God call us to himself, did he not at the same time, on his part, come down to us; or, did he not at least, by the interposition of means, stretch out his hand to us, so to speak, in order to lift us up to himself.

**3** *The sparrow also hath found a house for herself, and the swallow a nest for herself.* Some read this verse as one continuous sentence, conveying the idea that the birds made their nests near the altars;<sup>459</sup> from which it might the more evidently appear how hard and distressing his condition was in being kept at a distance from them. This opinion seems to be supported from the circumstance, that immediately before the Hebrew word for *altars*, there is the particle *eth*, which is commonly joined with the accusative case. But as it is also sometimes used in exclamations, the prophet, I have no doubt, breaking off in the middle of his sentence all at once, exclaims, that nothing would be more grateful to him than to behold the altar of God. David then, in the first place, with the view of aggravating the misery of his condition, compares himself with the sparrows and swallows, showing how hard a case it was for the children of Abraham to be driven out of the heritage which had been promised them, whilst the little birds found some place or other for building their nests.

<sup>458</sup> “Comme estort le pavillon de l’Arche.” — *Fr.*

<sup>459</sup> This is the sense given in our English Bible; to the accuracy of which Dr Adam Clarke objects. “It is very unlikely,” says he, “that sparrows and swallows, or birds of any kind, should be permitted to build their nests, and hatch their young, in or about altars, which were kept in a state of the *greatest purity*, and where *perpetual fires* were kept for the purpose of sacrifice, burning incense, etc.” He proposes to read the words beginning at the third verse and ending with *her young ones*, within a parenthesis, and to explain the remaining part of the verse as the conclusion of the sentence commencing at verse 2d; or to read the parenthesis as the close of verse 3d: “Even the sparrow hath found out a house, and the swallow (ring-dove) a nest for herself, where she may lay her young; *but I have no place either of rest or worship.*” But though it cannot be reasonably supposed that these birds would be permitted to nestle about the altar itself, before which the priests were continually serving; yet it is not improbable that they were permitted to construct their nests in the houses near the altar. “The altar,” says Dr Paxton, “is here by a synecdoche of a part for the whole, to be understood of the tabernacle, among the rafters of which, the sparrow and the swallow were allowed to nestle; or rather for the buildings which surrounded the sacred edifice where the priests and their assistants had their ordinary residence.” — *Paxton’s Illustrations of Scripture*, volume 2, pages 310, 355. Dr Morison, after quoting the criticism of Dr Clarke, observes, “I confess I see a great beauty in adhering to the sense given in the common version. Though the sparrow and ring-dove are represented as finding a nest for themselves at the altars of the sanctuary, it does not follow that the inspired writer intends any thing more than that, while he was exiled from the house of his God, these familiar birds had a home near that sacred spot where he had associated his chief joys.” Parkhurst considers, that a comparison is intended; and that though the particles of similitude “as” and “so” are not in the Hebrew text, they are to be understood. And in the Hebrew Scriptures, there are many instances in which they are omitted, but where it is necessary to supply them to make an intelligible version. He translates as follows: “Even (as) the sparrow findeth her house, and the dove her nest, where she hath laid her young, (so, should I find,) thy altars, O Jehovah of Hosts! my King, and my God.” According to this exposition, the Psalmist illustrates his vehement longing after the sacred tabernacle, and God’s public worship, by the natural affection of birds, and by that joy and delight with which they return to their brood after they have been absent from them. (See Parkhurst’s *Lexicon* on .2.) Walford takes the same view. His version is: —

“As the sparrow findeth a house, and the swallow a nest,  
Where she may place her offspring,  
So may thy altars be my abode, O Jehovah of Hosts!  
My King, and my God.”

He might sometimes find a comfortable retreat, and might even dwell among unbelievers with some degree of honor and state; but so long as he was deprived of liberty of access to the sanctuary, he seemed to himself to be in a manner banished from the whole world. Undoubtedly, the proper end which we ought to propose to ourselves in living, is to be engaged in the service of God. The manner in which he requires us to serve him is spiritual; but still it is necessary for us to make use of those external aids which he has wisely appointed for our observance. This is the reason why David all at once breaks forth into the exclamation, *O thine altars! thou Jehovah of Hosts!* Some might be ready to say in reference to his present circumstances, that there were many retreats in the world, where he might live in safety and repose, yea, that there were many who would gladly receive him as a guest under their roof, and that therefore he had no cause to be so greatly distressed. To this he answers, that he would rather relinquish the whole world than continue in a state of exclusion from the holy tabernacle; that he felt no place delightful at a distance from God's altars; and, in short, that no dwelling-place was agreeable to him beyond the limits of the Holy Land. This he would intimate, by the appellations which he gives to God, *My King, and my God*. In speaking thus, he gives us to understand that his life was uncomfortable and embittered, because he was banished from the kingdom of God. "Although all men," as if he had said, "should vie with each other in their eagerness to afford me shelter and entertainment, yet as thou art my King, what pleasure would it afford me to live in the world, so long as I am excluded from the territory of the Holy Land? And again, as thou art my God, for what end do I live but to seek after thee? Now, when thou castest me off, should I not despise every place of retreat and shelter which is offered me, however pleasant and delightful it may be to my flesh?"

**4** *Blessed are they who dwell in thy house.* Here the Psalmist expresses more distinctly the proper and legitimate use of the sanctuary; and thus he distinguishes himself from hypocrites, who are sedulously attentive to the observance of outward ceremonies, but destitute of genuine heart godliness. David, on the contrary, testifies, that the true worshippers of God offer to him the sacrifice of praise, which can never be dissociated from faith. Never will a man praise God from the heart, unless, relying upon his grace, he is a partaker of spiritual peace and joy.

### Psalm 84:5-7

**5.** Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; the ways are in their hearts. **6.** They passing through the valley of weeping, <sup>460</sup> will together make it a fountain; <sup>461</sup> the rain also will cover the

<sup>460</sup> "Ou, du meurier." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, of the mulberry-tree."

<sup>461</sup> "Fontem ponent." — *Lat.* "La rendent semblable a une fontaine." — *Fr.*

cisterns, [or reservoirs.] <sup>462</sup> 7. They will go from strength to strength; <sup>463</sup> the God of gods will be seen in Zion.

**5** *Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee.* David again informs us, that the purpose for which he desired liberty of access to the sanctuary was, not merely to gratify his eyes with what was to be seen there, but to make progress in faith. To lean with the whole heart upon God, is to attain to no ordinary degree of advancement: and this cannot be attained by any man, unless all his pride is laid prostrate in the dust, and his heart truly humbled. In proposing to himself this way of seeking God, David's object is to borrow from him by prayer the strength of which he feels himself to be destitute. The concluding clause of the verse, *the ways are in their hearts*, <sup>464</sup> is by some interpreted as meaning, That those are happy who walk in the way which God has appointed; for nothing is more injurious to a man than to trust in his own understanding. It is not improperly said of the law, "This is the way, walk ye in it," Isaiah 30:21. Whenever then men turn aside, however little it may be, from the divine law, they go astray, and become entangled in perverse errors. But it is more appropriate to restrict the clause to the scope of the passage, and to understand it as implying, that those are happy whose highest ambition it is to have God as the guide of their life, and who therefore desire to draw near to him. God, as we have formerly observed, is not satisfied with mere outward ceremonies. What he desires is, to rule and keep in subjection to himself all whom he invites to his tabernacle. Whoever then has learned how great a blessedness it is to rely upon God, will put forth all the desires and faculties of his mind, that with all speed he may hasten to Him.

**6** *They passing through the valley of weeping, will together make it a well.* The meaning of the Psalmist is, that no impediments can prevent the enlightened and courageous worshippers of God from making conscience of waiting upon the sanctuary. By this manner of speaking, he confirms the statement which he had previously made, That nothing is more desirable than to be daily engaged

<sup>462</sup> "Pools or reservoirs of water, as well as wells, are common in the Eastern deserts: the latter are supplied by springs, the former by rains, as here noticed: but both are to be found in considerable numbers in Judea, and are, according to Rauwolff, more numerous in these countries than springs that lie high; that is, than fountains and brooks of running water. Some of these have been made for the use of the people that dwell in the neighborhood; some for travelers, and especially those that travel for devotion; as for instance, such as go in pilgrimage to Mecca. The Psalmist appears to refer to provisions of this sort, made by the devout Israelites in the way of their progress to Jerusalem." — *Mant.*

This last clause has been very variously rendered. It has been understood by all the versions, in a different sense from that given to it by Calvin and our English version, which agrees with him. The Septuagint reads: "The law-giver will give blessings." Dr Adam Clarke: "Yea, the instructor is covered, or clothed with blessings." "God," says he, "takes care to give his followers teachers after his own heart, that shall feed them with knowledge: and while they are watering the people they are watered themselves." Mudge reads: "Even Moreh is clothed with ponds." He translates the 5th, 6th, and 7th verses thus: — "How happy the man whose strength is in thee! that travel the roads with their hearts. In the valley of Baca he maketh it a fountain; even Moreh is clothed with ponds. They walk from strength to strength; he appeareth before God in Zion." His note on these verses is as follows: — "I join the latter end of the 5th to the first word of the 6th, (so the Seventy direct, and the sense seems to require,) with a slight alteration into ; the change of number, I have often observed, is not to be regarded. 'How happy the man that feels himself invigorated by thee; that travels the roads that lead to Jerusalem, with full bent of heart! He goes through the valley of *Baca* as full of spirit as if it was cheered with a fountain of waters, and *Moreh*, as if it was filled with delicious ponds.' (Two desolate places I suppose, through which the road lay.) 'He grows lustier as he walks; he appears before God in Zion.'"

<sup>463</sup> "Ou, de troupe en troupe." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, from company to company."

<sup>464</sup> "Heb. *The ways are in his heart; i.e., the highways to the temple are the objects of his delight. In the former verses he had alluded to the happiness of the priests, etc., who were always engaged in the service of Jehovah; here he expresses the felicity of other Israelites, who frequented the worship of the temple.*" — *Dr Good's new Version of the Book of Psalms, with Notes.*

in the worship of God; showing, as he does, that no difficulties can put a stop to the ardent longings of the godly, and prevent them from hastening with alacrity, yea, even though their way should be through dry and barren deserts, to meet together to solemnise the holy assemblies. As the Hebrew word *habbacha*, when the final letter is *he*, signifies *tears*, and when the final letter is *aleph*, a mulberry tree, some here read *valley of tears*, and others, *valley of the mulberry*. The majority of interpreters adopt the first reading; but the other opinion is not destitute of probability.<sup>465</sup> There is, however, no doubt, that dry and barren deserts are here to be understood, in travelling through which, much difficulty and privation must be endured, particularly from the want of water; drink being of all other articles the most necessary to persons when travelling. David intended this as an argument to prove the steadfastness of the godly, whom the scarcity of water, which often discourages travelers from prosecuting their journey, will not hinder from hastening to seek God, though their way should be through sandy and and vales. In these words, reproof is administered to the slothfulness of those who will not submit to any inconvenience for the sake of being benefited by the service of God. They indulge themselves in their own ease and pleasures, and allow nothing to interfere with these. They will, therefore, provided they are not required to make any exertion or sacrifice, readily profess themselves to be the servants of God; but they would not give a hair of their head, or make the smallest sacrifice, to obtain the liberty of hearing the gospel preached, and of enjoying the sacraments. This slothful spirit, as is evident from daily observation, keeps multitudes fast bound to their nests, so that they cannot bear to forego in any degree their own ease and convenience. Yea, even in those places where they are summoned by the sound of the church-bell to public prayers<sup>466</sup> to hear the doctrine of salvation, or to partake of the holy mysteries, we see that some give themselves to sleep, some think only of gain, some are entangled with the affairs of the world, and others are engaged in their amusements. It is therefore not surprising, if those who live at a distance, and who cannot enjoy these religious services and means of salvation, without making some sacrifice of their worldly substance, remain lolling at home. That such may not live secure and self-satisfied in the enjoyment of outward prosperity, David declares, that those who have true heart religion, and who sincerely serve God, direct their steps to the sanctuary of God, not only when the way is easy and cheerful, under the shade and through delightful paths, but also when they must walk through rugged and barren deserts; and that they will rather make for themselves cisterns with immense toil, than be prevented from prosecuting their journey by reason of the drought of the country.

**7** *They will go from strength to strength.* In this verse the same sentiment is repeated. Mount Zion being the place where, according to the appointment of the law, the holy assemblies were observed, after the ark of the covenant was removed thither, it is said, that the people of God will come to Zion in great numbers, provoking one another to this good work.<sup>467</sup> The word *chayil*,

<sup>465</sup> “Ou la cloche sonnera pour appeler les gens aux prieres publiques.” — *Fr.*

<sup>466</sup> “Il dit que les fideles y viendront a grand foule, et a l’envie l’un de l’autre, comme on dit.” — *Fr.*

<sup>467</sup> “Horsley reads, ‘from wall to wall;’ Merrick, ‘from station to station;’ others, ‘from virtue to virtue,’ in the military sense. All come to the same effect; they persevere through all difficulty or opposition, having their hearts set on reaching Zion’s hill.” — *Williams*. “I think with Gejerus that the Hebrew may be translated *from strength to strength*, (answerably to the words *from faith to faith*, Romans 1:17, and *from glory to glory*, 2 Corinthians 3:18,) and signify, that whereas other travelers grow more and more weary as they travel, each of the pious persons here described shall, by the refreshments administered to them, proceed from one degree of strength to another, *viresque acquirit eundo*. As Jerusalem is represented in the New Testament as a type of heaven, I see nothing irrational in supposing that the inspired writer might, in describing the ascent to Jerusalem, have in view also that spiritual progress which leads to the city which is above, the mother of us all. The words before us are certainly very

seldom signifies a *troop*, or *band of men*, but most commonly *power*, or *strength*. It will therefore be more in accordance with the ordinary use of the term, to translate, *They will go from strength to strength*; <sup>468</sup> implying, that the saints are continually acquiring fresh strength for going up to mount Zion, and continue to prosecute their journey without weariness or fatigue, until they reach the wished-for place, and behold the countenance of God. If the word *troop* is preferred, the meaning will be, that not a few only will come, but numerous companies. The manner in which God manifested himself to his servants in the temple in old time, we have spoken of elsewhere, and especially on the 27th psalm, at the 4th and 5th verses. No visible image of God was there to be seen; but the ark of the covenant was a symbol of his presence, and genuine worshippers found from experience, that by this means they were greatly aided in approaching him.

### Psalm 84:8-11

**8.** O Jehovah, God of Hosts! hear my prayer: O God of Jacob! hearken. Selah. **9.** O God! our shield, behold; and look upon the face of thy Anointed. **10.** For better is one day in thy courts than a thousand elsewhere. <sup>469</sup> I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness. **11.** For Jehovah God is our sun and shield: Jehovah will give grace and glory: he will withhold no good thing from those who walk uprightly. O Jehovah of Hosts! blessed is the man who trusteth in thee.

**8** *O Jehovah, God of Hosts! hear my prayer.* David, instead of acting like worldly men, who foolishly and unprofitably distress and torment themselves by inwardly cherishing their desires, very wisely directs his wishes and prayers to God. From this it is also evident, that he was not accustomed to indulge in ostentatious boasting, as is the case with many hypocrites, who present to outward appearance a wonderful ardor of zeal, while yet the omniscient eye of God sees nothing but coldness in their hearts. In the first place, he supplicates in general, that God would vouchsafe to hear him. He next anticipates a temptation which might very readily arise from his being at present apparently cut off from the Church, and wards it off, by associating and ranking himself with all true believers, under the protection of God. Had he not been a member of the Church, he could not have said generally, and as it were in the person of all its members, *Our shield*. Having made this statement, he uses language still more expressive of high privilege, adducing the royal anointing with which God had honored him by the hand of Samuel, 1 Samuel 16:12. These words, *Look upon the face of thy anointed*, are very emphatic, and yet many interpreters pass over them very frigidly. He encourages himself in the hope of obtaining the favor of God, from the consideration that he had been anointed king in compliance with a divine command. Knowing, however, that his kingdom was merely a shadow and type of something more illustrious, there is no doubt, that in uttering these words, the object which he aspired after was, to obtain the divine favor through the intervention of the Mediator of whom he was a type. I am personally unworthy, as if he had said,

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applicable to the advances made in this progress, from strength to strength, from one stage of Christian perfection to another.”  
— *Merrick's Annotations*.

<sup>468</sup> “*Ailleurs*.” This supplement is not in the Latin version.

<sup>469</sup> And therefore the verb , *histopheph*, derived from this noun, signifies *to sit at the threshold*



that thou shouldest restore me, but the anointing by which thou hast made me a type of the only Redeemer will secure this blessing for me. We are thus taught, that the only way in which God becomes reconciled to us is through the mediation of Christ, whose presence scatters and dissipates all the dark clouds of our sins.

**10.** *For better is one day in thy courts than a thousand elsewhere.* Unlike the greater part of mankind, who desire to live without knowing why, wishing simply that their life may be prolonged, David here testifies, not only that the end which he proposed to himself in living was to serve God, but that in addition to this, he set a higher value on one day which he could spend in the divine service, than upon a long time passed among the men of the world, from whose society true religion is banished. It being lawful for none but the priests to enter into the inner and innermost courts of the temple, David expressly declares, that provided he were permitted to have a place at the porch, he would be contented with this humble station; for the Hebrew word , *saph*, signifies a *door-post*, or the *threshold of a house*.<sup>470</sup> The value which he set upon the sanctuary is presented in a very striking light by the comparison, that *he would prefer having a place at the very doors of the temple, to his having full possession of the tents of wickedness*, the plain import of which is, that he would rather be cast into a common and unhonoured place, provided he were among the people of God, than exalted to the highest rank of honor among unbelievers. A rare example of godliness indeed! Many are to be found who desire to occupy a place in the Church, but such is the sway which ambition has over the minds of men, that very few are content to continue among the number of the common and undistinguished class. Almost all are carried away with the frantic desire of rising to distinction, and can never think of being at ease until they have attained to some station of eminence.

**11.** *Jehovah God is our sun and shield.* The idea conveyed by the comparison derived from the sun is, that as the sun by his light vivifies, nourishes, and rejoices the world, so the benign countenance of God fills with joy the hearts of his people, or rather, that they neither live nor breathe except in so far as he shines upon them. By the term *shield* is meant, that our salvation, which would otherwise be perilled by countless dangers, is in perfect safety under his protection. The favor of God in communicating life to us would be far from adequate to the exigencies of our condition, unless at the same time, in the midst of so many dangers, he interposed his power as a buckler to defend us. The sentence immediately succeeding, *he will give grace and glory*, might be viewed as meaning, that those whom God has distinguished by his grace in this world, will at length be crowned with everlasting glory in his heavenly kingdom. But this distinction between grace and glory being, I am afraid, too refined, it will be preferable to explain the sentence as implying, that after God has once taken the faithful into his favor, he will advance them to high honor, and never cease to enrich them with his blessings.<sup>471</sup> This interpretation is confirmed by the following clause, *He will withhold no good thing from those who walk uprightly*, obviously teaching us, that God's bounty can never be exhausted, but flows without intermission. We learn from these words, that whatever excellence may be in us proceeds solely from the grace of God. They contain,

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<sup>470</sup> This explanation is adopted by Walford, who reads, "Jehovah giveth favor and honor." "The common gloss on these words," he observes, "is, that God first bestows grace on earth, and then glory in heaven. But this is an interpretation of the ear rather than of the understanding. The writer is evidently speaking of the present happy consequences of walking uprightly as he immediately says. The judgment of Calvin agrees with this statement."

<sup>471</sup> "It is generally agreed, that the subject of this psalm is the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity; in celebrating which, the Psalmist is carried by a prophetic impulse to foretell a much greater deliverance by the coming of Christ." — *Dimock*.

at the same time, this special mark, by which the genuine worshippers of God may be distinguished from others, That their life is framed and regulated according to the principles of strict integrity.

The exclamation with which David concludes the psalm, *Blessed is the man who trusteth in thee*, seems to refer to the season of his banishment. He had previously described the blessedness of those who dwell in the courts of the Lord, and now he avows, that although he was for a time deprived of that privilege, he was far from being altogether miserable, because he was supported by the best of all consolations, that which arose from beholding from a distance the grace of God. This is an example well worthy of special attention. So long as we are deprived of God's benefits, we must necessarily groan and be sad in heart. But, that the sense of our distresses may not overwhelm us, we ought to impress it upon our minds, that even in the midst of our calamities we do not cease to be happy, when faith and patience are in exercise.

# PSALM 85

God having afflicted his people with new troubles and calamities, after their return from their captivity in Babylon, they, in the first place, make mention of their deliverance as an argument why he should not leave unfinished the work of his grace. Then they complain of the long continuance of their afflictions. And, in the third place, inspired with hope and confidence, they triumph in the blessedness promised them; for their restoration to their own country was connected with the kingdom of Christ, from which they anticipated an abundance of all good things.<sup>472</sup>

*To the chief musician, a Psalm of the sons of Korah.*

## Psalm 85:1-4

**1.** O Jehovah! thou hast been favorable to thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob. **2.** Thou hast taken away the iniquity<sup>473</sup> of thy people: thou hast covered all their sins. Selah. **3.** Thou hast turned away all thy anger: thou hast drawn back the fury of thy indignation. **4.** Turn us, O God of our salvation! and cause thy anger against us to cease.

**1** *O Jehovah! thou hast been favorable to thy land.* Those who translate these words in the future tense, in my opinion, mar their meaning. This psalm, it is probable, was endited to be sung by the people when they were persecuted by the cruel tyranny of Antiochus; and from the deliverance wrought for them in the past, they were encouraged to expect in the future, fresh and continued tokens of the divine favor, — God having thereby testified, that their sins, however numerous and aggravated, could not efface from his memory the remembrance of his covenant, so as to render him inexorable towards the children of Abraham, and deaf to their prayers.<sup>474</sup> Had they not previously experienced such remarkable proofs of the divine goodness, they must necessarily have been overwhelmed with the load of their present afflictions, especially when so long protracted. The cause of their deliverance from captivity they attribute to the free love with which God had embraced the land which he had chosen for himself. Whence it follows, that the course of his favor was unintermitted; and the faithful also were inspired with confidence in prayer, by the reflection that, mindful of his choice, he had shown himself merciful to his own land. We have elsewhere had occasion to remark, that nothing contributes more effectually to encourage us to come to the throne of grace, than the remembrance of God's former benefits. Our faith would immediately succumb under adversity, and sorrow would choke our hearts, were we not taught to believe from the

<sup>472</sup> “ , *nasata avon*, ‘Thou hast borne, or carried away, the iniquity. An allusion to the ceremony of the *scape-goat*.’ — *Dr Adam Clarke* “It is a maxim among the Jewish doctors,” says Hammond, “that captivity is one way of expiation, and so to return from thence was a sure indication that the sin for which it was inflicted was remitted or done away. This, saith Abarbanel, on Leviticus 16, was adumbrated in the *Azazel*, or *scape-goat*, which, as the other that was slain, was a *sin-offering*, as appears, Leviticus 16:5. ‘He shall take two kids for a sin-offering.’ And then the ‘confessing the sins over him,’ mentioned 16:21, (‘Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, etc., putting them on the head of the goat: And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities into a land of separation,’ 16:22,) shows that they were to carry their sins with them into the land of their captivity, meant by *the land of separation*, that *land* whatsoever it was, whither the Divine Providence had designed their deportation. From whence therefore being now returned, their *sins*, for which they were thus punished, are supposed to be left behind them, no more to be laid to their charge, if their return to their former *sins* do not cause them to be called to remembrance.”

<sup>473</sup> “Ne faire qu’il ne fust enclin et pitie envers les enfans d’ Abraham pour exaucer leurs prieres.” — *Fr.*

<sup>474</sup> “Ou, si est ce *que*.” — *Fr. marg.* “Or, Yet.”

experience of the past, that he is inclined compassionately to hear the prayers of his servants, and always affords them succor when the exigencies of their circumstances require it; especially as there remains at all times the same reason for continuing his goodness. Thus the prophet happily applies to believers of his own day, the benefits which God in old time bestowed upon their fathers, because both they and their fathers were called to the hope of the same inheritance.

**2** *Thou hast taken away the iniquity of thy people.* It was very natural for the faithful to feel alarmed and perplexed on account of their sins, and therefore the prophet removes all ground for overwhelming apprehension, by showing them, that God, in delivering his people, had given an irrefragable proof of free forgiveness. He had before traced this deliverance to the mere good pleasure and free grace of God as its source; but after it was wrought, the iniquities of the people having separated between them and their God, and estranged them from him, it was necessary that the remedy of pardon should be brought to their aid. In saying that *their iniquities were taken away*, he does not refer to the faithful being reformed and purged from their sins, in other words, to that work by which God, sanctifying them by the Spirit of regeneration, actually removes sin from them. What he intended to say he explains immediately after. The amount, in short, is, that God was reconciled to the Jews by not imputing their sins to them. When God is said *to cover sins*, the meaning is, that he buries them, so that they come not into judgment, as we have shown more at large on the 32nd psalm, at the beginning. When, therefore, he had punished the sins of his people by captivity, it being his will to restore them again to their own country, he removed the great impediment to this, by blotting out their transgressions; for deliverance from punishment depends upon the remission of sin. Thus we are furnished with an argument in confutation of that foolish conceit of the Sophists, which they set forth as some great mystery, That God retains the punishment although he forgive the fault; whereas God announces in every part of his word, that his object in pardoning is, that being pacified, he may at the same time mitigate the punishment. Of this we have an additional confirmation in the following verse, where we are informed, that God was mercifully inclined towards his people, that he might withdraw his hand from chastising them. What answer in any degree plausible can be given to this by the Sophists, who affirm that God would not be righteous did he not, after he had forgiven the fault, execute punishment according to the strict demands of his justice? The sequence of the pardon of sin is, that God by his blessing testifies that he is no longer displeased.

**4** *Turn us, O God of our salvation!* The faithful now make a practical application to themselves, in their present circumstances, of what they had rehearsed before concerning God's paternal tenderness towards his people whom he had redeemed. And they attribute to him, by whom they desire to be restored to their former state, the appellation, *O God of our salvation!* to encourage themselves, even in the most desperate circumstances, in the hope of being delivered by the power of God. Although to the eye of sense and reason there may be no apparent ground to hope favourably as to our condition, it becomes us to believe that our salvation rests secure in his hand, and that, whenever he pleases, he can easily and readily find the means of bringing salvation to us. *God's anger* being the cause and origin of all calamities, the faithful beseech him to remove it. This order demands our special attention; for so effeminate and faint-hearted in bearing adversity are we, that no sooner does God begin to smite us with his little finger, than we entreat him, with groaning and lamentable cries, to spare us. But we forget to plead, what should chiefly engage our thoughts, that he would deliver us from guilt and condemnation; and we forget this because we are reluctant to descend into our own hearts and to examine ourselves.

## Psalm 85:5-8

**5.** Wilt thou be wroth against us for ever? wilt thou prolong thy displeasure from age to age? **6.** Wilt thou not turn again and quicken us? and thy people will rejoice in thee. **7.** Show us thy mercy, O Jehovah! and grant us thy salvation. **8.** I will hear what God Jehovah will speak: surely he will speak peace to his people and to his meek ones, and they will not turn again to folly.

**5** *Wilt thou be wroth against us for ever?* Here the godly bewail the long continuance of their afflictions, and derive an argument in prayer from the nature of God, as it is described in the law,

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 “The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin,”  
 (Exodus 34:6, 7,)

— a truth which has also been brought under our notice in Psalm 30:5, “For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favor is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” It thus becomes us, when we engage in prayer, to meditate upon the Divine promises that we may be furnished with suitable expressions. It may seem, at first view, that these devout Jews find fault with God, as if he exhibited his character to them in a light very different from that in which he was wont to exhibit it; but the object they had in view undoubtedly was to obtain, in the struggle they were resolutely maintaining against temptation, hope of relief from the contemplation of the nature of God; as if they laid it down as a fixed principle, that it is impossible for Him to be angry for ever. We may observe, by the way, that it is evident, from their praying in this manner, that they were weighed down with such an oppressive load of calamities, as to be almost unable any longer to endure them. Let us therefore learn, that although God may not immediately grant us manifest tokens of his returning favor, yet we must not cease to persevere in earnest prayer. If it is objected, that then God has promised in vain that his anger would be of short duration, I answer, that if we entertain suitable views of our own sins, his anger will assuredly appear to be always of short continuance; and if we call to remembrance the everlasting course of his mercy, we will confess that his anger endures but for a moment. As our corrupt nature is ever relapsing into the wanton indulgence of its native propensities, manifold corrections are indispensably necessary to subdue it thoroughly.

The godly, still dwelling on the same theme, ask, in the 6th verse, whether *God will not turn again and quicken them* Being fully convinced of the truth of this principle, That the punishments with which God chastises his children are only temporary; they thereby encourage themselves in the confident expectation, that although he may be now justly displeased, and may have turned away his face from them, yet, when they implore his mercy, he will be entreated, and raising the dead to life again, will turn their mourning into gladness. By the word *quicken*, they complain that they almost resemble persons who are dead, or that they are stunned and laid prostrate with afflictions. And when they promise themselves matter of rejoicing, they intimate that in the meantime they are well nigh worn out with sorrow.

**7.** *Show us thy mercy, O Jehovah!* In these words there is the same contrast as in the preceding sentence. In supplicating that mercy may be extended to them, and deliverance granted them, they confess that they are deprived of all sense of both these blessings. Such having been the state of the saints in old time, let us learn, even when we are so oppressed with calamities as to be reduced

to extremity, and on the brink of despair, to betake ourselves notwithstanding to God. *Mercy* is appropriately put in the first place; and then there is added *salvation*, which is the work and fruit of mercy; for no other reason can be assigned why God is induced to show himself our Savior, but that he is merciful. Whence it follows, that all who urge their own merits before Him as a plea for obtaining his favor, are shutting up the way of salvation.

8. *I will hear what God Jehovah will speak.* The prophet, by his own example, here exhorts the whole body of the Church to quiet and calm endurance. As he had burst forth under the influence of strong emotion into a degree of vehemence, he now restrains himself as it were with a bridle; and in all our desires, be they never so devout and holy, we must always beware of their running to excess. When a man gives indulgence to his own infirmity, he is easily carried beyond the bounds of moderation by an undue ardor. For this reason the prophet enjoins silence, both upon himself and others, that they may patiently wait God's own time. By these words, he shows that he was in a composed state of mind, and, as it were, continued silent, because he was persuaded that the care of God is exercised about his Church. Had he thought that fortune held the sovereignty of the world, and that mankind are whirled round by a blind impulse, he would not, as he does, have represented God as sustaining the function of governing. *To speak*, in this passage, is equivalent to *command*, or to *appoint*. It is, as if he had said, Being confident that the remedy for our present calamities is in the hand of God, I will remain quiet until the fit time for delivering the Church arrive. As then the unruliness of our passions murmur, and raise an uproar against God, so patience is a kind of silence by which the godly keep themselves in subjection to his authority. In the second clause of the verse, the Psalmist comes to the conclusion, that the condition of the Church will be more prosperous: *Surely he will speak peace to his people, and to his meek ones.* As God rules supreme over the affairs of men, he cannot but provide for the welfare of his Church, which is the object of his special love. The word *peace*, we have elsewhere shown, is employed by the Hebrews to denote prosperity; and, accordingly, what is here expressed is, that the Church, by the Divine blessing, will prosper. Moreover, by the word *speak*, it is intimated that God will not fail to regard his promises. The Psalmist might have spoken more plainly of Divine Providence, as for instance in these terms, "I will look to what God will do;" but as the benefits bestowed upon the Church flow from the Divine promises, he makes mention of God's *mouth* rather than of his *hand*; and, at the same time, he shows that patience depends upon the quiet hearing of faith. When those to whom God speaks peace are not only described as *his people*, but also as *his meek ones*, this is a mark by which the genuine people of God are distinguished from such as bear merely the title of his people. As hypocrites arrogantly claim to themselves all the privileges of the Church, it is requisite to repel and exhibit the groundlessness of their boasting, in order to let them know that they are justly excluded from the promises of God.

*And they will not turn again to folly.* The particle rendered *and* has usually been explained in this way: *That they may not turn again to folly*; as if this clause were added to express the fruit of the Divine goodness. As God, in dealing graciously with his people, allures them to himself, that they may continue obedient to him, the prophet, as these interpreters contend, maintains that they will not again return to folly, because the Divine goodness will serve as a bridle to restrain them. This exposition is admissible; but it will be more suitable to refer the sentence to the whole subject comprised in the passage — to regard it, in short, as meaning, that after God has sufficiently chastised his Church, he will at length show himself merciful to her, that the saints, taught by chastisements, may exercise a stricter vigilance over themselves in future. The cause is shown why God suspends

and delays the communications of his grace. As the physician, although his patient may experience some alleviation of his disease, keeps him still under medicinal treatment, until he become fully convalescent, and until, the cause of his disease being removed, his constitution become invigorated, — for to allow him all at once to use whatever diet he chose, would be highly injurious to him; — so God, perceiving that we are not completely recovered from our vices to spiritual health in one day, prolongs his chastisements: without which we would be in danger of a speedy relapse. Accordingly, the prophet, to assuage the grief with which the protracted duration of calamities would oppress the faithful, applies this remedy and solace, That God purposely continues his corrections for a longer period than they would wish, that they may be brought in good earnest to repent, and excited to be more on their guard in future.

### Psalm 85:9-13

**9.** Surely <sup>475</sup> his salvation is near to them that fear him, that glory may dwell in our land. **10.** Mercy and truth shall meet together; righteousness and peace shall kiss each other. **11.** Truth shall spring [or bud] out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven. **12.** Likewise, Jehovah will grant prosperity: and our land shall yield her increase. **13.** Righteousness shall go before him; and set her steps in the way.

**9** *Surely his salvation is near to them that fear him.* Here the Psalmist confirms the statement made in the preceding verse. He encourages both himself and other servants of God in the hope, that although to outward appearance God was far off from his people, yet deliverance was near at hand; because it is certain, that God secretly regards those whom he seems openly to neglect. If it is considered preferable to take the particle *ach*, adversatively, *Yet his salvation*, etc., — a sense in which it is often used in Hebrew — the sentence will be fuller. The prophet had just now said, that God continues to lengthen out the chastisement of his people, when he perceives that they are too prone to fall anew into sin; and here, lest his slowness in removing the stroke of his hand should prove too much for their patience, he qualifies the above statement, by observing, that even when the Divine help seems slowest in coming it is then near at hand. *The glory* which in the second part of the verse he anticipates *will dwell in the land*, is undoubtedly set in opposition to the ruinous appearance it then presented to the eye, which was a token of the dreadful anger of God, and which consigned the land to ignominy and reproach. <sup>476</sup> By this language, therefore, he encourages himself

<sup>475</sup> Walford, who thinks that the composition of this psalm is referable to some period subsequent to the return of God's ancient people from Babylon, explains this concluding clause of the 9th verse as follows: — "The glory that is here spoken of is that which was formerly enjoyed, when they were surrounded on all sides by prosperity; and when especially they were favored with the tokens of the divine presence, in the performance of all the instituted worship of the sanctuary, when the ark, the temples etc., were in their pristine beauty and splendor."

<sup>476</sup> *Mercy and truth* are very generally applied by commentators to God; and the passage is understood as the celebration of the harmony of the divine attributes in the salvation of man. The description is one of great beauty and sublimity. "How admirable," says Bishop Lowth, in illustrating this verse, "is that celebrated personification of the divine attributes by the Psalmist; How just, elegant, and splendid does it appear, if applied only according to the literal sense, to the restoration of the Jewish nation from the Babylonish captivity! but if interpreted as relating to that sublimer, more sacred, and mystical sense, which is not obscurely shadowed under the ostensible image, it is certainly uncommonly noble and elevated, mysterious and sublime." — (*Lowth's Lectures on Hebrew Poetry*, volume 1, page 284.)

and other genuine believers to repentance, putting them in mind, that the grievous oppression, accompanied with insult and derision, to which they were subjected by the tyranny of their enemies, was to be ascribed entirely to their having driven away the salvation of God from them by their sins.

**10.** *Mercy and truth shall meet together.* Here the verbs are in the past tense; but it is evident from the scope of the passage, that they should be translated into the future. I cordially embrace the opinion which is held by many, that we have here a prophecy concerning the kingdom of Christ. There is no doubt, that the faithful lifted up their eyes to Him, when their faith had need of encouragement and support in reference to the restoration of the Church; and especially after their return from Babylon. Meanwhile, the design of the prophet is, to show how bountifully God deals with his Church, after he is reconciled to her. The fruits which he represents as springing from this reconciliation are, first, that *mercy and truth meet together*; and, secondly, that *righteousness and peace embrace each other*. From these words, Augustine deduces a beautiful sentiment, and one fraught with the sweetest consolation, That the mercy of God is the origin and source of all his promises, from whence issues the righteousness which is offered to us by the gospel, while from that righteousness proceeds the peace which we obtain by faith, when God justifies us freely. According to him, *righteousness* is represented *as looking down from heaven*, because it is the free gift of God, and not acquired by the merit of works; and that it comes from heaven, because it is not to be found among men, who are by nature utterly destitute of it. He also explains *truth springing out of the earth* as meaning, that God affords the most incontestable evidence of his faithfulness, in fulfilling what he has promised. But as we ought rather to seek after the solid truth, than exercise our ingenuity in searching out refined interpretations, let us rest contented with the natural meaning of the passage, which is, that mercy, truth, peace, and righteousness, will form the grand and ennobling distinction of the kingdom of Christ. The prophet does not proclaim the praises of men, but commends the grace which he had before hoped for, and supplicated from God only; thus teaching us to regard it as an undoubted truth, that all these blessings flow from God. By the figure synecdoche, some parts being put for the whole, there is described in these four words all the ingredients of true happiness. When cruelty rages with impunity, when truth is extinguished, when righteousness is oppressed and trampled under foot, and when all things are embroiled in confusion, were it not better that the world should be brought to an end, than that such a state of things should continue? Whence it follows, that nothing can contribute more effectually to the promotion of a happy life, than that these four virtues should flourish and rule supreme. The reign of Christ, in other parts of Scripture, is adorned with almost similar encomiums. If, however, any one would rather understand *mercy and truth* as referring to God, I have no disposition to enter into dispute

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Dr Adam Clarke gives a turn to the text, which still more heightens its effect. "It would be more simple," says he, "to translate the original,

‘Mercy and truth have met on the way;  
Righteousness and peace have embraced.’

This is a remarkable text, and much has been said on it: but there is a beauty in it, which I think has not been noticed.

“*Mercy* and *peace* are on one side: *truth* and *righteousness* on the other. *Truth* requires *righteousness*; *mercy* calls for *peace*.

“They meet together on the way; one going to make inquisition for sin, the other to plead for reconciliation. Having met, their differences on certain considerations (not here particularly mentioned) are adjusted: their mutual claims are blended together in one common interest; on which *peace* and *righteousness* immediately embrace. Thus *righteousness* is given to *truth*; and *peace* is given to *mercy*. “Now, *Where* did these meet? — In Christ Jesus. “When were they reconciled? — When He poured out His life on Calvary.”



with him. <sup>477</sup> *The springing of truth out of the earth, and the looking down of righteousness from heaven*, without doubt imply, that truth and righteousness will be universally diffused, as well above as beneath, so as to fill both heaven and earth. It is not meant to attribute something different to each of them, but to affirm in general, that there will be no corner of the earth where these qualities do not flourish.

**12.** *Likewise, Jehovah will grant prosperity.* Some take this verse allegorically, and interpret it of the increase of spiritual blessings; but this does not agree with the particle , *gam*, rendered *likewise*, by which the prophet, in my opinion, intends to express the completeness of that blessedness of which he had spoken. He therefore mentions the *fruit of the earth*, as an additional proof of God's surpassing beneficence. The chief happiness of the Church is comprehended in these four blessings which he had specified; but the provision which is required for the support of our bodies ought not to be considered as unworthy of attention, provided our care about this matter is kept within proper bounds. If it is objected that these two subjects — the spiritual kingdom of Christ, and the fruitfulness of the earth, are improperly intermingled, it may be easily observed in reply, that there is nothing at all incongruous in this, when we consider that God, while he bestows upon his people spiritual blessings, gives them, in addition to these, some taste of his fatherly love, in the outward benefits which relate to the life of the body; it being evident from the testimony of Paul, that

“godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come,” (1 Timothy 4:8.)

But let it be observed, that the faithful generally have only granted to them a limited portion of the comforts of this transitory life: that they may not be lulled asleep by the allurements of earth. I have therefore said, that, while on earth, they only taste of God's fatherly love, and are not filled with an overflowing abundance of the good things of this world. Moreover, we are taught from this verse, that the power and capacity of the earth to produce fruit for the sustenance of our bodies was not given to it once for all, — as the heathen imagine God at the first creation to have adapted each element to its proper office, while he now sits in heaven in a state of indolence and repose; — but that the earth is from year to year rendered fruitful by the secret influence of God, who designs hereby to afford us a manifestation of his goodness.

**13.** *Righteousness shall go before him.* The word *righteousness* is taken by some for *a righteous person*; but this is unnatural. Viewed in this light, the passage, indeed, contains the useful and important truth, That the righteous man will walk before God, and will make it his object to regulate all his actions according to the principles of moral rectitude. But there being no necessity for wresting the word *righteousness* so violently, it will be better to adopt the more correct and simple view, which is, that under the reign of Christ order will be so well established, that righteousness will walk before God, and occupy every path. The prophet seems thus to call back the attention of the faithful to what constitutes the chief elements of blessedness; for although God may grant to his servants an abundant supply of sustenance for the body, it is unbecoming for them to have their hearts set upon this. And in truth, one difference between us and the lower animals is, that God, instead of pampering and stuffing our bellies, for the mere gratification of our animal appetites, directs our views to higher and more important objects. When it is said that *righteousness shall go before God*, the meaning is, that the prevalence and unobstructed course of righteousness, which is equivalent to *setting her steps in the way*, is to be attributed to the appointment of God. Isaiah,

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<sup>477</sup> “Pource qu'on luy defend de se trouver en public et que chacun la repousse.” — *Fr.*

on the contrary, complains that equity, instead of setting her steps in the way, is prohibited from making her appearance in public, and meets with a universal repulse. “And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter,” (Isaiah 59:14.) In this psalm prayers and holy meditations, engaged in with the view of nourishing and confirming faith, together with praises and thanksgivings, are intermingled. It having been difficult in the judgment of carnal reason for David to escape from the distresses with which he was environed, he sets in opposition to its conclusions the infinite goodness and power of God. Nor does he simply request deliverance from his enemies; but he also prays that the fear of God may be implanted and firmly established in his heart.

# PSALM 86

In this psalm prayers and holy meditations, engaged in with the view of nourishing and confirming faith, together with praises and thanksgivings, are intermingled. It having been difficult in the judgement of carnal reason for David to escape from the distresses with which he was environed, he sets in opposition to its conclusions the infinite goodness and power of God. Nor does he simply request deliverance from his enemies; but he also prays that the fear of God may be implanted and firmly established in heart.

## *A Prayer of David.*

### **Psalm 86:1-7**

**1.** Incline thy ear, O Jehovah! answer me; for I am poor and needy. **2.** Preserve my soul, for I am meek: <sup>478</sup> O my God! save thy servant who trusteth in thee. **3.** Have mercy upon me, O Jehovah! for daily <sup>479</sup> do I cry to thee. **4.** Make glad the soul of thy servant; for to thee, O Lord! <sup>480</sup> do I lift up my soul. **5.** For thou, O Lord! art good, and gracious, and of great mercy to all who call upon thee. **6.** Listen, O Jehovah! to my prayer, and attend to the voice of my supplications. **7.** In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me.

**1. *Incline thy ear, O Jehovah!*** Neither the inscription nor the contents of this psalm enable us to conclude with certainty what dangers David here complains of; but the psalm in all probability refers to that period of his life when he was persecuted by Saul, and describes the train of thought which then occupied his mind, although it may not have been written until after his restoration to a state of outward peace and tranquillity, when he enjoyed greater leisure. He does not without cause allege before God the oppressions which he endured as a plea for obtaining the divine favor; for nothing is more suitable to the nature of God than to succor the afflicted: and the more severely any one is oppressed, and the more destitute he is of the resources of human aid, the more inclined is God graciously to help him. That despair therefore may not overwhelm our minds under our greatest afflictions, let us support ourselves from the consideration that the Holy Spirit has dictated this prayer for the poor and the afflicted.

**2. *Preserve my soul, for I am meek.*** Here the Psalmist adduces two other arguments by which to stir up God to grant him succor, — his own gentleness towards his neighbors, and the trust which he reposed in God. In the first clause he may seem at first sight to make some pretensions to personal worth; yet he plainly shows that nothing was farther from his intention than to insinuate that by any merits of his own he had brought God under obligations to preserve him. But the particular mention made of his *clemency* or *meekness* tends to exhibit in a more odious light the wickedness of his enemies, who had treated so shamefully, and with such inhumanity, a man against whom

<sup>478</sup> “Hezekiah, in the season of distress, 2 Kings 19:16, begins his prayer with these words: which may have occasioned the tradition of the Jews that he made use of this psalm on that occasion.” — *Warner*.

<sup>479</sup> In our English version it is, “for I am holy.” Cresswell would rather render, “for I am merciful and pious.” “That,” says he, “is the meaning of the Hebrew word, which the Septuagint and Jerome have rendered by *holy*. The Psalmist supplicates God’s favor upon five several grounds, namely, his destitution, (verse 1;) his mercifulness and goodness, (verse 2;) his trust in God, (verse 2;) his prayerfulness, (verses 3, 4;) and God’s goodness, (verse 5.)” — *Cresswell*.

<sup>480</sup> “Ou, tout le jour.” — *Fr. marg.* “Or, all the day.”

they could bring no well-founded charge, and who had even endeavored to the utmost of his power to please them.<sup>481</sup> Since God then has avowed himself to be the defender both of good causes and of those who follow after righteousness, David, not without good reason, testifies that he had endeavored to exercise kindness and gentleness; that from this it may appear that he was basely requited by his enemies, when they gratuitously acted with cruelty towards a merciful man. But as it would not be enough for our lives to be characterised by kindness and righteousness, an additional qualification is subjoined — that of *trust* or *confidence in God*, which is the mother of all true religion. Some, we are aware, have been endued with so high a degree of integrity, as to have obtained among men the praise of being perfectly just, even as Aristides gloried in having never given any man cause of sorrow. But as those men, with all the excellence of their virtues, were either filled with ambition, or inflated with pride, which made them trust more to themselves than to God, it is not surprising to find them suffering the punishment of their vanity. In reading profane history, we are disposed to marvel how it came to pass that God abandoned the honest, the grave, and the temperate, to the enraged passions of a wicked multitude; but there is no reason for wondering at this when we reflect that such persons, relying on their own strength and virtue, despised the grace of God with all the superciliousness of impiety. Making an idol of their own virtue they disdained to lift up their eyes to Him. Although, therefore, we may have the testimony of an approving conscience, and although He may be the best witness of our innocence, yet if we are desirous of obtaining his assistance, it is necessary for us to commit our hopes and anxieties to him. If it is objected, that in this way the gate is shut against sinners, I answer, that when God invites to himself those who are blameless and upright in their deportment, this does not imply that he forthwith repels all who are punished on account of their sins; for they have an opportunity given them, if they will improve it, for prayer and the acknowledgement of their guilt.<sup>482</sup> But if those whom we have never offended unrighteously assail us, we have ground for double confidence before God.

**3** *Have mercy upon me, O Jehovah!* The Psalmist again betakes himself to the mercy of God. The word *chanan*, which I have rendered *have mercy*, is substantially the same as to *gratify*, to *do a pleasure*. It is as if he had said, I bring no merit of my own, but humbly pray for deliverance solely on the ground of thy mercy. When he speaks of *crying daily*, it is a proof of his hope and confidence, of which we have spoken a little before. By the word *cry*, as I have already had occasion frequently to remark, is denoted vehemence and earnestness of soul. The saints do not indeed always pray with a loud voice; but their secret sighs and groanings resound and echo upwards, and, ascending from their hearts, penetrate even into heaven. The inspired suppliant not only represents himself as crying, but as persevering in doing so, to teach us that he was not discouraged at the first or second encounter, but continued in prayer with untiring earnestness. In the following verse, he expresses more definitely the end for which he besought God to be merciful to him, which was, that his sorrow might be removed. In the second clause, he declares that there was no hypocrisy in his crying; for he *lifted up his soul* to God, which is the chief characteristic of right prayer.

**5** *For thou, O Lord! art good and propitious.*<sup>483</sup> We have here a confirmation of the whole preceding doctrine, derived from the nature of God. It would avail the afflicted nothing to have

<sup>481</sup> Here, and in all the verses in this psalm where *Adonai*, occurs, many MSS. read *Yehovah* We have before observed, (volume 1, page 13, note 2, and page 195, note,) that the Jews, out of reverence to the incommunicable name Jehovah, pronounce where *is* in the text. It is, therefore, not improbable that *is* is the true reading in all these places.

<sup>482</sup> “Veu que luy qui estoit homme innocent, voire qui s’estoit efforce de tout son pouvoir a leur faire plaisir.” — *Fr.*

<sup>483</sup> “Quia illis ad manum est deprecatio.” — *Lat.* “Car ils ont en main la priere et recognoissance de leur faute.” — *Fr.*

recourse to him, and to lift up their desires and prayers to heaven, were they not persuaded that he is a faithful rewarder of all who call upon him. The point upon which David now insists is, that God is bountiful and inclined to compassion, and that his mercy is so great, as to render it impossible for him to reject any who implore his aid. He calls God *propitious*, or ascribes to him the attribute of pardoning sin, which is a modification of his goodness. It were not enough for God to be *good* in general, did he not also extend to sinners his forgiving mercy, which is the meaning of the word *salach*. Farther, although David magnifies the plenteousness of God's mercy, yet he immediately after represents this plenteousness as restricted to the faithful who call upon him, to teach us that those who, making no account of God, obstinately chafe upon the bit, deservedly perish in their calamities. At the same time, he uses the term *all*, that every man, without exception, from the greatest to the least, may be encouraged confidently to betake himself to the goodness and mercy of God.

**6** *Listen, O Jehovah! to my prayer.* From the earnest repetition of his former requests in this and the subsequent verse, it is evident that he was oppressed with no ordinary degree of grief, and also agitated with extreme anxiety, From this example, we are taught that those who, having engaged in prayer once, allow themselves immediately to give over that exercise, provided God does not at once grant them their desire, betray the coldness and inconstancy of their hearts. Nor is this repetition of the same requests to be thought superfluous; for hereby the saints, by little and little, discharge their cares into the bosom of God, and this importunity is a sacrifice of a sweet savor before Him. When the Psalmist says, *God will hear me when I cry in the day of trouble*, he makes a particular application to himself of the truth which he had just now stated, That God is merciful and gracious to all who call upon him.

### Psalm 86:8-11

**8.** Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord! nor any that can work as thou workest. **9.** All the nations which thou hast made shall come and worship before thy face, O Lord! and shall give glory to thy name. **10.** For thou art great, and thou alone, O God! doest wondrous things. **11.** Show me thy ways, O Jehovah! I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name.

**8** *Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord!* Here the Psalmist may be considered either as bursting forth into thanksgivings, after having obtained what he desired, or else as gathering courage and new strength for prayer. The latter opinion I am most inclined to adopt; but perhaps it may be preferable to regard both views as included. Some understand the word *Elohim*, as denoting *angels* — *There is none like unto thee, O Lord! among the angels* — as if David compared them with the Most High God; but this does not seem to agree so well with the passage. He does not humble the angels, representing them as inferior gods, that they may give place to the power of God; but he holds up to contempt and derision all the false gods in whom the heathen world imagined some help was to be found;<sup>484</sup> and he does this because they could supply no evidence

<sup>484</sup> The word for “and propitious” is *vesallach*, which Bythner renders, “and a pardoner.” It is from *salach*, *he forgave, pardoned*

of their being gods from their works. Had he distributed the power of working between them and the true God in different degrees, assigning less to the former and more to the latter, he would not have attributed to God that which is naturally and exclusively his own. He therefore affirms, without qualification, that no characteristic of Deity could be perceived in them, or traced in any works performed by them. In calling us to the consideration of works, he clearly shows, that those who indulge in ingenious speculations about the occult or secret essence of God, and pass over the unequivocal traces of his majesty which are to be seen beaming forth in bright effulgence in his works, do but trifle and spend their time to no purpose. As the Divine nature is infinitely exalted above the comprehension of our understanding, David wisely confines his attention to the testimony of God's works, and declares that the gods who put forth no power are false and counterfeit. If it is objected that there is no comparison between God and the silly inventions of men, the answer is obvious, That this language is employed in accommodation to the ignorance of the generality of men. The effrontery with which the superstitious exalt the spurious fabrications of their own brain above the heavens is well known; and David very justly derides their madness in forging gods to themselves, which in reality are no gods.

9 *All nations which thou hast made shall come.*<sup>485</sup> If any would rather limit what is here stated to David's present case, this view does not seem liable to any material objection. He, in fact, often enhances the Divine goodness of which he himself had experience by the like magnificent strain. It may, however, be fitly extended to the universal power of God; but whether he speaks of the grace that was bestowed upon himself alone, or treats, in general, of the works of God, we must bear in mind what has been observed in another place, that whenever he celebrates the prevalence of true godliness among the heathen, he has an eye to the kingdom of Christ, prior to whose coming God gave only the initial or dawning manifestation of his glory, which at length was diffused through the whole world by the preaching of the Gospel. David was not ignorant of the future calling of the Gentiles; but this being a doctrine with which Jewish ears were not familiar, that people would have felt it a disagreeable announcement, to have been told that the Gentiles should come to worship God indiscriminately with the children of Abraham, and, all distinction being removed, become partakers with them of heavenly truth. To soften the announcement, he asserts that the Gentiles also *were created by God*, so that it ought not to be accounted strange if they, being enlightened also, should at length acknowledge Him who had created and fashioned them.

10. *For thou art great, and thou alone, O God! doest wondrous things.* In this verse there is again repeated the cause which will bring all nations to worship before the Lord, namely, the discovery made of his glory by the *greatness of his works*. The contemplation of God's glory in his works is the true way of acquiring genuine godliness. The pride of the flesh would always lead it to wing its way into heaven; but, as our understandings fail us in such an extended investigation, our most profitable course is, according to the small measure of our feeble capacity, to seek God in his works, which bear witness of him. Let us therefore learn to awaken our understandings to contemplate the divine works, and let us leave the presumptuous to wander in their own intricate

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<sup>485</sup> “*Among the gods, i.e., among the gods of the Gentiles, such as Baal, Baal-berith, Baal-zebul, Dagon, Ashtoreth, Chemosh, Milcom, Nisroch, and especially, as R. Kimchi thinks, the heavenly bodies, the sun and the stars. Some commentators suppose that it may mean, among angels, or among princes. There is good reason for doubting, however, with Parkhurst, whether the word Alaim ever positively means princes, judges, or magistrates; and the passage (Judges 13:22) quoted by Buxtorf, to show that it sometimes means an angel, only proves that Manoah intended to say that he had seen God in the person of his angel. Comp. Psalm 89:7; 96:5.*” — *Cresswell*.

mazes, which, in the end, will invariably land them in an abyss from which they will be unable to extricate themselves. To incline our hearts to exercise this modesty, David magnificently extols the works of God, calling them *wondrous things*, although to the blind, and those who have no taste for them, they are destitute of attraction. In the meantime, we ought carefully to attend to this truth, That the glory of Godhead belongs exclusively to the one true God; for in no other being is it possible to find the wisdom, or the power, or the righteousness, or any of the numerous marks of divinity which shine forth in his wonderful works. Whence it follows, that the Papists are chargeable with rendering, as much as in them lies, his title to true Godhead nugatory, when despoiling him of his attributes they leave him almost nothing but the bare name.

**11.** *Show me thy ways, O Jehovah!* David now rises higher, praying that he may be governed by the spirit of sound understanding, in order to his living a holy life, and that he may be strengthened in his endeavors thereto by the spirit of fortitude. He tacitly contrasts *the ways of God* with all the counsels which he could derive from carnal reason. In submitting himself to God, and in imploring Him to be his guide, he confesses that the only possible way by which we can be enabled to live a holy and an upright life is, when God goes before us, while we follow after him; and, accordingly, that those who deviate, let it be never so little, from the law through a proud conceit of their own wisdom, wander from the right path. This he more fully confirms, by adding immediately after, *I will walk in thy truth*. He pronounces all to be guilty of vanity and lying who observe not this rule of truth. Farther, his prayer to be taught in the ways of the Lord does not imply that he had been previously altogether ignorant of divine truth; but well aware of the much darkness — of the many clouds of ignorance in which he was still enveloped, he aspires after greater improvement. Let it also be observed, that he is not to be understood as speaking only of external teaching: but having the law among his hands, he prays for the inward light of the Holy Spirit, that he may not labor in the unprofitable task of learning only the letter; according as he prays in another place,

“Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law,” (Psalm 119:18.)

If a prophet so distinguished, and so richly endued with the graces of the Holy Spirit, makes such a frank and cordial confession of his own ignorance, how great our folly if we feel not our own deficiency, and are not stirred up to greater diligence in self-improvement from the knowledge of our slender attainments! And, assuredly, the more progress a man has made in the knowledge of the true religion, the more sensible will he be that he is far from the mark. Secondly, it is necessary to add, that reading or hearing is not enough, unless God impart to us inward light by his Spirit.

In addition to this, the Psalmist desires that his heart may be framed for yielding obedience to God, and that it may be firmly established therein; for as our understanding has need of light, so has our will of uprightness. The original words which I have translated, *unite my heart*, are translated by some, *rejoice my heart*, as if the verb were from the root, *chadah*, to rejoice;<sup>486</sup> but it rather comes from *yachad*, to unite — a sense which is very suitable to the passage before us.<sup>487</sup> This word contains a tacit contrast, which has not been sufficiently attended to, between the unwavering purpose with which the heart of man cleaves to God when it is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the disquietude with which it is distracted and tossed so long as it fluctuates amidst its

<sup>486</sup> “This verse has been considered, with great probability, as a prediction of the calling of the Gentiles under the messiah. See Romans 15:9.” — *Warner*.

<sup>487</sup> The reading of the LXX. is, “Let my heart rejoice,” with which the Syriac agrees; and this sense is adopted by several critics, as Muis, Dr Durell, and others.

own affections. It is therefore indispensably requisite, that the faithful, after having learned what is right, should firmly and cordially embrace it, that the heart may not break forth in impetuous desire after unhallowed lusts. Thus, in the word *unite*, there is a very beautiful metaphor, conveying the idea, that the heart of man is full of tumult, drawn asunder, and, as it were, scattered about in fragments, until God has gathered it to himself, and holds it together in a state of steadfast and persevering obedience. From this also, it is manifest what free will is able to do of itself. Two powers are ascribed to it; but David confesses that he is destitute of both; setting the light of the Holy Spirit in opposition to the blindness of his own mind; and affirming that uprightness of heart is entirely the gift of God.

### Psalm 86:12-17

**12.** I will praise thee, O Lord my God! With all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for ever. **13.** For thy mercy has been great towards me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lower grave. <sup>488</sup> **14.** O God! the proud have risen up against me, and a company of mighty men have sought after my soul; and they have not set thee before them. **15.** And thou, O Lord! art God, merciful, ready to forgive, long-suffering, and abundant in mercy and truth. **16.** Look to me, and have pity upon me: give thy strength to thy servant, and save the son of thy handmaid. **17.** Make with me a sign for good: and my adversaries will see it <sup>489</sup> and be ashamed; for thou, O Jehovah! hast succoured and comforted me.

**12.** *I will praise thee, O Lord my God!* David engages, when he shall have experienced God to be in all respects a beneficent father, to yield to him the tribute of gratitude. He expressed in the preceding verse a desire to have his heart united to God, that he might fear him; and now he affirms it to be his resolution to publish or celebrate his praises, not only with the mouth or tongue, but also with sincere affection of heart; yea, even to continue with steadfast perseverance in that exercise.

In the 13th verse, he sets forth the reason of this, which is, because, in delivering him, God had given a singular and remarkable proof of his mercy. To place in a stronger light the greatness of this benefit, he describes the dangers from which he had been delivered, by the expression, *the lower grave*; as if he had said, I have not been held down by one death only, but have been thrust down into the lowest depths of the grave, so that my circumstances required the hand of God to be stretched out to me in a wonderful manner. By the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we are delivered from a still deeper abyss of death; and such being the case, our ingratitude will be inexcusable, unless each of us exercise himself to the utmost of his power in celebrating this deliverance. If David so highly magnified the name of God merely on account of the prolongation of his life for a short time, what praises are due for this unparalleled redemption by which we are drawn from the depths of hell and elevated to heaven? The Papists attempt to found an argument on this passage

<sup>488</sup> Bishop Law would read, "Make my heart *one*, that it may fear thy name;" that is, says he, "Let the fear of thee be the *one* ruling disposition of my soul." — Quoted in Warner's Psalter, with Notes.

<sup>489</sup> The original word here for *grave* is *sheol*; on which Mr Peters remarks, that if *sheol* here meant only a deliverance from death and the grave, the expression, *lower*, or lowest, would be quite unnecessary. "The lower grave" may, however, be a figurative expression for a state of the deepest distress.



in support of their doctrine of Purgatory, as if that were an upper hell, while there was another lower;<sup>490</sup> but this argument is too rotten to stand in need of refutation.

**14.** *O God! the proud are risen up against me.* Instead of *זְדִים, zedim, the proud*, some read, *זָרִים, zarim, strangers*; and, undoubtedly, the Scriptures often employ this word to denote barbarous cruelty, so that it is the same as if it had been said, *the cruel*. I, however, prefer following the generally received reading. As between the Hebrew word *זְדִים, zedim, the proud*, and *זָרִים, zarim, strangers*, there is only the difference of a single letter, the one having the letter *דַּלֶּת, daleth*, where the other has the letter *רֶשֶׁת, resh*, it is obvious that, from the similarity of these two letters, the former might easily have been changed into the latter. Besides, the word, *proud*, agrees better with the scope of the passage; for, in the same sense, the Psalmist immediately after applies the epithet, *strong*, to those who, with headlong impetuosity and fierceness, rushed upon him to destroy him; and we know that where pride reigns no moderation is observed. He expresses without figure what he had just now said respecting the grave. Being as a lamb in the midst of wolves, he would have been quickly swallowed up, had not God miraculously delivered him, as it were, from the jaws of death. In representing his enemies as having no regard to God, he means to set forth the extreme excess of their cruelty. The fury of our lusts, unless we are restrained by the fear of God and the sense of his judgment, will become so great as to dare any thing, however atrocious. For these calamities he seeks a remedy, in the Divine mercy, in the following verse.

**15.** *And thou, O Lord! art God, merciful, ready to forgive.* By immediately passing on to the celebration of these divine attributes, he would intimate, that we have adequate strength and protection against the audacity and rage of the wicked, in the divine goodness, mercy, and faithfulness. Perhaps, also, from his feeling that the wicked were scourges in the hand of God, he set before himself the divine goodness and mercy, to allay the excess of terror with which he might be seized; for this is the true and the only source of comfort, that although God chastise us he does not forget his mercy. This sentence, as is well known, is taken from Exodus 34:6, where we meet with a very remarkable description of the nature of God. First, he is called *merciful*; in the next place, *ready to forgive*, which he manifests by compassionating our distresses. In the third place, he is described as *long-suffering*; for he is not angry whenever an offense is committed against him, but pardons us according to the greatness of his loving-kindness. In short, he is said to be *abundant in mercy and truth*; by which I understand, that his beneficence is continually exercised, and that he is always true. He is indeed no less worthy to be praised on account of his rigour, than on account of his mercy; but as it is our wilful obstinacy alone which makes him severe, compelling him, as it were, to punish us, the Scriptures, in representing him as by nature merciful and ready to forgive, teach us, that if he is at any time rigorous and severe, this is, as it were, accidental to him. I am speaking, it is true, in popular language, and such as is not strictly correct; but still, these terms by which the divine character is described amount in effect to this, That God is by nature so gracious and ready to forgive, that he seems to connive at our sins, delays the infliction of punishment, and never proceeds to execute vengeance unless compelled by our obstinate wickedness. Why the *truth* of God is joined with his *mercy* has been considered in another place. As even those who are most generous sometimes desire to retract the promises which they have made, repenting

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<sup>490</sup> Street reads, "That those who hate me may fear. The word *זָרִים*," he observes, "if considered without the points, may be the third person plural of *זָרַע, to fear*; but the authors of all the versions seem to have derived it from *זָרָה, to see* I read *זָרִים* instead of *זָרָה*."

of their too great facility, we who are accustomed unreasonably to judge of God by ourselves, distrust his promises. God therefore declares, that he is unlike men, because he is as firm to his purpose in abundantly performing whatever he has promised, as he is distinguished for promising liberally.

**16.** *Look to me, and have pity upon me.* Here the Psalmist makes a more distinct application to himself of what he had said concerning the divine mercy and goodness. As God is merciful, he assures himself that his welfare will be the object of the divine care. The second verb in the verse, *chanan*, which I have rendered *have pity*, signifies *to gratify, to do one a pleasure*; and is intended to convey the idea, that the succor which God affords to his people proceeds from his free goodness.<sup>491</sup> Finally, the Psalmist concludes, that the only way in which he can be preserved is by the divine aid, which he seeks to obtain by prayer; and thus he confesses his utter destitution of any strength of his own. In applying to himself the appellation of *God's servant, and the son of his handmaid*, he does not boast of his own services, but urges as a plea, for obtaining greater favor at the divine hand, the long line of his ancestors, and the continual course of God's grace; setting forth, that he was from his mother's womb a household-servant of God, and, as it were, born one of his servants in his house:<sup>492</sup> a point of which we have already spoken elsewhere.

The last verse contains an additional confirmation of the statement, that he was in a manner forsaken of God. He would not have desired to be favored with some token of the divine favor, had he not been on all sides driven to despair, and had not the divine favor been hidden from him to try his patience. It was a proof of no ordinary steadfastness to maintain the conflict with this temptation, and to do this *so successfully*, as not to cease to descry light in the midst of darkness. He desires that *his enemies may be put to shame*, because they assailed his simplicity with mockery and scoffing, as if he had acted a foolish part by trusting in God. The miserable and distressing condition in which the Church was placed after the Babylonish captivity, might be apt to sink the minds of the godly into despondency; and, accordingly, the Holy Spirit here promises her restoration in a wonderful and incredible manner, so that nothing would be more desirable than to be reckoned among the number of her members.

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<sup>491</sup> “Comme si c'estoit un enfer plus haut, et qu'il y en eust un autre plus bas.” — *Fr.*

<sup>492</sup> “Et est pour monstrier que le secours que Dieu donne aux siens, procede de sa bonte gratuite.” — *Fr.*

# PSALM 87

## *A Psalm or Song of the sons of Korah.*

It is evident, from constant observation, that, so long as the children of this world are in prosperity, they are well satisfied with their condition, and mightily extol it, while they look upon the Church with proud contempt; and even after having endured calamities, they are not so subdued by them as to renounce the foolish presumption by which they are intoxicated. Meanwhile they recklessly despise all religion, and the worship of God, because, contenting themselves with pleasures, riches, and the splendor of honor, they fancy themselves to be happy without him. And then it often happens, that the Lord pampers them with all kind of good things, purposing at length to inflict upon them merited punishment for their ingratitude, when the fit season shall have arrived; while, on the contrary, he loads his Church with various and grievous afflictions, or, at least, keeps her in a low and despised condition, so that she may seem to herself to be miserable, or she is at least exposed to the contempt of others. That the faithful may not be deceived with this shadowy appearance of things, it is of importance to recall their attention to a different subject, that they may be persuaded of the truth of what is stated in Psalm 33:12,

“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance.”

(Psalm 33:12)

What we are taught in this psalm may be summed up in this, That the Church of God far excels all the kingdoms and politics of the world, inasmuch as she is watched over, and protected by Him in all her interests, and placed under his government; that, in the first place, amidst the violent commotions and dreadful storms with which the whole world is often shaken, she may continue safe; and, in the second place, and principally, that being wonderfully preserved by the protection of the same God, she may at length, after the toil and struggle of a protracted warfare, be crowned with the triumphant laurels of her high calling. It is in truth a singular benefit of God, and at the same time, a signal miracle, that, amidst the great and various revolutions of the kingdoms of this world, he enlarges her continually from age to age, and preserves her from destruction; so that in the whole world there is nothing enduring but the Church. As, however, it often happens, that whilst the wicked abound in riches, and have lavished upon them worldly possessions and authority, the afflicted Church is tossed amidst many dangers, or rather, is so overwhelmed with impetuous floods as to seem to be entirely shipwrecked, her happiness must be considered as consisting principally in this, that she has reserved for her an everlasting state in heaven.

An attention to the time when this psalm was composed will contribute, in no small degree, to a clear understanding of its contents. Although the people had returned from their captivity in Babylon; although the Church of God had been again gathered together, and united into one body after a long dispersion; although the temple had been rebuilt, the altar set up, and the service of God restored; yet, as of a vast multitude of people, there was only a small portion remaining, which made the condition of the Church very low and despised, — as the number left was daily diminished by their enemies, — and as the temple was far inferior in magnificence to what it originally was; — all this being considered, the faithful had hardly any ground to entertain favorable hopes as to the future. It certainly seemed impossible that they would ever again be raised to their former state from which they had fallen. There was, therefore, reason to apprehend that the minds of the godly,

both from the remembrance of the overthrow which they had already experienced, and from the weight of the present miseries with which they were oppressed, would faint and finally sink into despair. That they might not succumb under such heavy adversities, the Lord not only promises in this psalm that they would recover what they had lost, but also encourages them in the hope of an incomparable glory with which the Church should yet be invested, according to that prophecy of Haggai,

“The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former.” (Haggai 2:9)

Last of all, it remains that we learn to accommodate this psalm to our own circumstances, and study to derive from it the lessons which it is fitted to convey. The consolation contained in it ought to have had such influence on the godly of that age, as to have made them not only stand erect in the midst of their adversities, but also to have raised them from the grave, and lifted them up to heaven. In the present day, when we know that whatever was foretold by the Spirit has been fulfilled, we are more than ungrateful if the experience of the fathers, added to the words of the Spirit, does not more powerfully confirm our faith. It is impossible to express in language adequate to the subject the glory with which Christ beautified his Church by his advent. Then the true religion which before had been shut up within the narrow limits of Judea was spread abroad through the whole world. Then God, who had been known only by one family, began to be called upon in the different languages of all nations. Then the world, which had been miserably rent in pieces by innumerable sects of superstition and error, was gathered together into a holy unity of faith. Then all men, vying with each other, associated themselves in companies to the society of the Jews, whom they had before abhorred. Then the kings of the earth and their people voluntarily yielded themselves to the yoke of Christ; wolves and lions were converted into lambs; the gifts of the Holy Spirit were poured out upon the faithful, — gifts which far surpassed all the glory, all the riches, and grandeur, and precious ornaments of the world.<sup>493</sup> The body of the Church also was gathered together out of countries far distant from each other, and was increased and preserved in a wonderful manner. The gospel was spread far and wide within a period of time incredibly short, and equally extraordinary was the rich harvest of fruit with which the preaching of it was succeeded. Although, therefore, the renown of the Church had never been celebrated by this prophecy, yet the goodly and unequalled condition of that age, which may be called the Golden Age, clearly demonstrate that she was truly the heavenly kingdom of God. It was however requisite, even at that period, that the faithful should form their estimate of her excellence by something higher than carnal sense or reason. At the time when she flourished most, it was not purple, gold, and precious stones, which imparted to her the splendor which invested her, but the blood of martyrs. Rich she was in the graces of the Spirit, and yet poor and destitute of earthly possessions. Beautiful and glorious in holiness before God and the angels, she was nevertheless contemptible in the eyes of the world. Without she had many avowed enemies, who either exercised towards her fierce and cruel persecution, or by indirect acts practiced against her, the worst that craft could suggest; while within were alarms and treachery. In short, her dignity, venerable indeed, but yet spiritual, lay as yet hidden beneath the cross of Christ. The consolation, therefore, contained in this psalm was very seasonable, even at that time, for encouraging the faithful to wait for a more perfect state of the Church. But the

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<sup>493</sup> “Que des le ventre de sa mere il est serviteur domestique de Dieu, et comme nay d’un sien serviteur en la maison.” — *Fr.*

case stands otherwise with us. It has already long ago come to pass,<sup>494</sup> through the default of our fathers, that that renowned beauty of the Church has lain polluted and disfigured under the feet of the wicked. And at the present day, overwhelmed with the load of our sins, she groans under miserable desolation, under the scornful reproaches of the devil and the world, under the cruelty of tyrants, and under the wicked calumnies of enemies; so that the children of this world, who wish to live at ease, desire nothing less than to be accounted among the people of God. Whence we may perceive the more clearly how much benefit may be derived from this psalm; and, at the same time, how necessary it is to meditate upon it continually. The title does not so much refer to the authors of the psalm as to the chief musicians to whom it was committed to be sung. It is, however, possible that some Levite of the family of Korah composed it.

### Psalm 87:1-3

**1.** His foundations are in the holy mountains. **2.** Jehovah loveth the gates of Zion above all the dwellings of Jacob. **3.** Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God! Selah.

**1** *His foundations are in the holy mountains.* Those who conceive that Jerusalem is here meant, as if it were said to *be founded upon the holy mountains*, are in my judgment mistaken; for the relative is in the masculine gender. Some learned men, I am aware, defend this opinion, by supposing that the words, *the people*, are to be supplied, although it is the capital of Judea which is specified. But it is unnecessary for me to say any thing to prove what is apparent to all, that this exposition is forced. Some Jewish interpreters have thought it most probable that this opening sentence is to be referred to the psalm itself; and, accordingly, they explain *foundations* as denoting metaphorically the theme, or subject of the poem, because it treats of the holy city Jerusalem, which was situated upon mountains. But I am surprised that they should have been mistaken in a matter so very obvious. It being quite a common thing among the Hebrews to put a relative without its antecedent,<sup>495</sup> this manner of speaking ought not to seem harsh or strange. The name of God is mentioned a little after; and we know that he is everywhere represented as having founded Jerusalem.

Some by *the mountains* understand Moriah and Zion,<sup>496</sup> which were the two tops of a mountain cleft into two, but this is too forced. As the country was mountainous, we are rather to understand the prophet as having in his eye the several neighboring and contiguous mountains which formed a chain around Jerusalem; for we will see in another place that Jerusalem was surrounded by mountains, (Psalm 125:2.) The true and natural meaning then is, that God chose the holy mountains in order to found and erect his city in the midst of them. For a little after, in the prosecution of the subject, these words occur, “The Highest himself shall establish her.” He is indeed the founder of other cities also; yet we do not read of him saying with respect to any other city,

“This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell; for I have desired it,”

(Psalm 132:14.)

<sup>494</sup> “Lesquels surmontoyent de beaucoup toute la gloire, toutes les richesses et magnificences et les precieux ornemens du monde.” — *Fr.*

<sup>495</sup> “Il est advenu desja de pieca.” — *Fr.*

<sup>496</sup> As examples of this, see 2 Samuel 1:19, 25; Psalm 114:2; Song of Solomon 1:2; Isaiah 23:1; 26:1, 3; 30:4; 41:2; 55:4; Jeremiah 33:2; Lamentations 3:1; Nahum 1:8.

There is this difference, which is always to be remembered, that while other cities were founded and built by the guidance and power of God, merely for the sake of civil government, Jerusalem was his peculiar sanctuary, and his royal seat. Isaiah also uses a similar form of expression, (Isaiah 14:32,) “The Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it.” Besides, although the whole country of Judea was consecrated to God, yet he is said to have rejected all the other cities, and to have chosen this one for himself in which to reign. Here the question is not about earthly polity, but spiritual government; for the pure religion, and the true worship of God, and the doctrine of godliness, were at that time to be found nowhere but in Jerusalem.

**2** *Jehovah loveth the gates of Zion above all the dwellings of Jacob.* Here we are taught that all the excellence of the holy city depended on the free choice which God had made of it. With this agrees what is stated in Psalm 78:60, 67, that God rejected Shiloh, the tribe of Ephraim, and the tabernacle of Joseph, that he might dwell in Zion which he loved. The prophet then points out the cause why God preferred that one place before all others; and the cause which he assigns is, not the worth of the place itself, but the free love of God. If it is demanded why Jerusalem was so highly distinguished, let this short answer be deemed sufficient, *Because it so pleased God.* To this the divine love is to be traced as its source; but the end of such a choice was, that there might be some fixed place in which the true religion should be preserved, and the unity of the faith maintained, until the advent of Christ, and from which it might afterwards flow into all the regions of the earth. This, then, explains why the prophet celebrates Jerusalem as possessing the high distinction of having God for its master-builder, its founder and protector. Farther, he attributes to the divine favor and adoption whatever excellence it possessed above other places. In putting *Zion* for Jerusalem, and the *gates* for the whole compass of the city, there is a double synecdoche.

**3** *Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God!* The reading literally is, *That which is spoken in thee are glorious things.* We must consider the design of the prophet, or rather the object of the Spirit of God, speaking by the mouth of the prophet. From the low and despised condition of the whole people, from the many and terrible enemies who pressed hard upon them on all sides, from the small number who had sufficient courage to surmount the obstacles in their way, from the new and unlooked-for changes which were daily springing up, from the danger there was lest the state of affairs gradually sinking more and more into decay, should at length become desperate, it was difficult to cherish the hope that the holy city would be restored. That despair might not overcome the hearts of the faithful, and cause them to fail, there is set before them the supporting and consolatory consideration, that the Lord hath spoken differently concerning the future condition of the Church. Their attention, there can be no doubt, is called away from the present aspect of things, and directed to the promises which inspired them with the hope of the wonderful glory with which she should be adorned. Although, therefore, nothing appeared to the eye of sense and reason, calculated greatly to rejoice the heart, yet the prophet would have them encouraged by the word to stand as it were on a watch-tower, waiting patiently for the fulfillment of what God had promised. In this way they were admonished, first, to direct their attention to the ancient prophecies, and to keep in remembrance, especially those which are contained in Isaiah from the fortieth chapter (Isaiah 40) to the end of the book; and, secondly, to give ear to the servants of God, who at that time preached the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Whence it follows that a right judgment cannot be formed of the happiness of the Church, except when we estimate it according to the standard of God’s word.

## Psalm 87:4-6

**4.** I will make mention of Rahab,<sup>497</sup> and Babel among them that know me: behold the Philistines, and Tyre, with Ethiopia,<sup>498</sup> he is born there! <sup>499</sup> Selah. **5.** And it shall be said of Zion, Man and man is born in her: and the Most High himself will establish her. **6.** The Lord will recount when he writeth the peoples, he is born there. Selah.

**4** *I will make mention of Rahab and Babel.* The name of *Rahab* is put for Egypt in many other parts of Scripture; and this signification is very suitable to the present passage, the object of which is to portray the magnificent amplitude of the Church, which as yet was only matter of hope. It is therefore said that those who formerly were deadly enemies, or entire strangers, shall not only become familiar friends, but shall also be ingrafted into one body, that they may be accounted citizens of Jerusalem. In the first clause it is said, *I will make mention of Egypt and Babylon among my household.* In the second, it is added, that the Philistines, Tyrians, and Ethiopians, who hitherto had been so much at variance with the people of God, shall now be brought into as cordial harmony with them as if they were Jews by birth. What a glorious distinction of the Church, that even those who held her in contempt shall come flocking to her from every quarter, and that those who desired to see her completely cut up and destroyed, shall consider it the highest honor to have a place among the number of her citizens, and to be accounted such! All of them shall voluntarily renounce their own countries in which they had before proudly boasted. Wherever they may have been born, whether in Palestine, or Ethiopia, or Tyre, they shall profess themselves citizens of the holy city.

The Hebrew doctors explain this passage as meaning, that there shall spring from other nations very few who shall excel either in mental endowment or in virtuous attainment, but that in Israel such persons will be very numerous. Scarcely, say they, will there be found among the Tyrians, the Egyptians, the Ethiopians, and other nations, a man to each of them worthy of praise; so that if such an one be found among them, he may be pointed at with the finger, on account of his rarity; but *in Zion man and man shall be born;*<sup>500</sup> that is to say, the number of such men among the Jews shall be great. Christian doctors are almost unanimous in referring these words to Christ, and think that the cause is here assigned why those who hitherto were strangers, and even mortal enemies to each other, are now to be numbered among the citizens of Jerusalem, namely, because Christ shall be born there,<sup>501</sup> whose office it is to gather together into the unity of faith and hope of eternal life, men who were scattered like members torn from the body. The first of these interpretations being altogether forced, needs no refutation. Moreover, it is very evident that the Jews, actuated by a foolish ambition, wrest this passage as it were purposely. The exposition of the Christian doctors is, at first sight, plausible from its ingenuity; but it is destitute of solidity. The words clearly imply,

<sup>497</sup> Warner, who adopts this opinion, observes: — “Though the hills round about Jerusalem (Psalm 125:2) were all *holy*, from their proximity to the *holy city*, yet those of Zion and Moriah (Psalm 48:2) were more especially so, as on them were built the tabernacle, the palace of David, and the temple of Solomon.”

<sup>498</sup> *Rahab* is a poetical name of Egypt, (Isaiah 30:7; 51:9; Psalm 87:4; 89:11.) It signifies *pride* or *fierceness*, and seems to have been given to Egypt by the Jews, in memorial of the cruel tyranny which had been exercised over them by the Egyptians during their bondage among that people.

<sup>499</sup> “*Ethiopia*, the land of Cush, which was in Arabia.” — *Williams*.

<sup>500</sup> “These nations, as amongst those best known to the Jews, typify the entire Gentile world; and are intended to declare the accession of all the earth to the faith of Christianity.” — *Tucker*.

<sup>501</sup> “*But of Zion it shall be said, He and He were born there; i.e., not one, but many men of note.*” — *Geddes*.

that whatever nation men may belong to, they shall willingly renounce their own country, to be enrolled in the Register of the chosen people. When it is said, that *they are born there*, this does not mean that they are natives of the country, and have been brought up in it from their birth, but that they are its citizens. What is added afterwards, *The Most High himself will establish her*, may, with equal propriety, be translated, *will order her*; it being the work of God specially to govern his Church by his word.

5 *And it shall be said of Zion, Man and man is born in her.* It is asserted, in the 4th verse, That new citizens shall be gathered into the Church of God from different parts of the world; and here the same subject is prosecuted. Another figure is however employed, which is, that strangers by birth shall be accounted among the holy people, just as if they were descended from Abraham. It had been stated in the preceding verse, that the Chaldeans and Egyptians would be added to the household of the Church; and that the Ethiopians, Philistines, and Tyrians, would be enrolled among her children. Now, it is added, by way of confirmation, that the number of the new progeny shall be exceeding great, so that the city which had been for a time uninhabited, and afterwards only half filled with a few people, shall be crowded with a vast population. The prophet Isaiah describes more at length what is here promised, in a few words,

“Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord. Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes: for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.” (Isaiah 54:1)

Also,

“Lift up thine eyes round about, and see; all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side.” (Isaiah 60:4)

And, in the 44th chapter, at the 5th verse, we meet with almost the same language as in the passage before us, or at least what comes very near to it: “One shall say, I am the Lord’s; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.” Nor is the word *born* inappropriately employed to express the fact, that the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and such like, shall be of the flock of God’s people. Although Zion was not the place of their natural birth, but they were to be grafted into the body of the holy people by adoption; yet as the way by which we enter into the Church is a second birth, this form of expression is used with great propriety. The condition upon which Christ espouses the faithful to himself is, that they should forget their own people and their father’s house, (Psalm 45:11,) and that, being formed into new creatures, and born again of incorruptible seed, they should begin to be the children of God as well as of the Church, (Galatians 4:19.) And the ministry of the Church, and it alone, is undoubtedly the means by which we are born again to a heavenly life. By the way, we should remember the difference which the Apostle sets forth as subsisting between the earthly Jerusalem, — which, being herself a bondwoman, brings forth children also in bondage, — and the heavenly Jerusalem, which brings forth free children by the instrumentality of the Gospel.

In the second part of the verse, there is expressed the stability and enduring character of Zion. It often happens, that in proportion to the rapidity with which cities rise to distinguished eminence, is the shortness of the continuance of their prosperity. That it may not be thought that the prosperity



of the Church is of such a perishable and transitory nature, it is declared, that *the Most High himself will establish her* It is not surprising, as if it had been said, to find other cities shaken, and subject from time to time to a variety of vicissitudes; for they are carried round with the world in its revolutions, and do not enjoy everlasting defenders. But it is the very reverse with respect to the new Jerusalem, which, being founded upon the power of God, will continue even when heaven and earth shall fall into ruins.

6 *The Lord will recount, when he writeth the peoples.* The meaning is, that Zion will acquire such renown as to excite all men with the greatest earnestness to desire to be admitted into the number and rank of her citizens. It is a highly honorable condition which is spoken of, the language implying, that when God shall take a census of the people on whom he will be graciously pleased to confer the highest honor, he will write them as belonging to Zion, rather than to Babylon or any other cities; for to be one of the common people among the citizens of Zion, will be a greater distinction than to be invested with the highest rank anywhere else. We are, at the same time, taught that the cause to which we are to trace the sudden elevation of these aliens to so great honor, is the favor of God. Those who are the bondslaves of Satan and of sin will assuredly never be able to obtain, by any efforts of their own, the right of citizenship in the heavenly Jerusalem. It is the Lord's peculiar work to divide people into their respective ranks, distinguishing one from another, as seemeth good to him, all men being on a level by nature. This passage is to be understood as referring to effectual calling. God, it is true, wrote the names of his children in the Book of Life before the creation of the world; but he enrolls them in the catalogue of his saints, only when, having regenerated them by the Spirit of adoption, he impresses his own mark upon them.

## Psalm 87:7

7. And the singers as the players upon instruments: all my springs are in thee.<sup>502</sup>

The meaning of this verse is obscure, partly from its abrupt brevity, and partly from the ambiguity of one word. The word *springs* is, beyond all controversy, to be here taken metaphorically; but interpreters are not agreed as to the explanation of the metaphor. Some understand it as denoting *hopes*, some *affections*, and others *thoughts*. Did the idiom of the language admit, I would willingly subscribe to the opinion of those who translate it *melodies* or *songs*. But as this might be considered unsupported by the usage of the Hebrew term, I am rather inclined to adopt, as most suitable to the subject in hand, the opinion that *lookings* is the proper translation, the root of the word signifying *an eye*. It is as if the Psalmist had said, I will always be earnestly looking, as it were, with fixed eyes upon thee.

Let us now inquire what is meant by the other clause, *The singers as the players upon instruments*. This, it is true, is an abrupt form of expression; but the sense, about which there is a

<sup>502</sup> Horsley, who takes this view, translates —

“And every one shall say of Zion,  
He was born there:”

on which he has the following note: — “*Unusquisque*, every one. Every one shall confess, to the honor of the Israelites, that the Savior was a native Jew.” Dimock objects to this, observing that Christ was not born at Jerusalem.

general agreement, is, that so great will be the ground for rejoicing, that the praises of God will resound in Zion continually, with the energy of the living voice, as well as with musical instruments. This, then, is a confirmation of what was spoken before concerning the glorious restoration of Zion; for by the greatness of the joy, and the manifold harmony and melody of praises, is portrayed the happiness which shall prevail in the midst of it. At the same time, we have here described the great design of all the gifts which God has conferred upon his Church with so liberal a hand; namely, that the faithful, by hymns and songs, should testify their remembrance of his benefits and gratefully acknowledge them.<sup>503</sup> The Hebrew word *cholelim*, which we have rendered *the players upon instruments*, is translated by some, *those who dance to the sound of instruments*.<sup>504</sup> But this is a matter of no great importance, it being enough to consider the meaning, in short, as this, that there will be a continual concert of God's praises in the Church, where he unfolds the treasures of his grace, and that the faithful will be heard singing successively and in response. Moreover, the prophet shows his singular love to the Church, and the singular care and zeal which he exercised about her, to encourage and stir up all the godly, by his example, to cultivate and manifest the same zeal, agreeably to what is stated in another psalm,

“If I forget thee, O Jerusalem! let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.” (Psalm 137:5)

All our affections are then settled on the Church, when, gathered in from the vague and vain objects by which they are distracted, and regarding with indifference the honors, pleasures, riches, and pageantries of the world, they find enough to engage and satisfy them in the spiritual glory of Christ's kingdom, and in that alone.

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<sup>503</sup> Cresswell connects the second clause of this verse with the first, in this manner: — “Singers also, and players upon the pipe, shall chant, ‘All my wells are in thee;’” *i.e.*, says he, “all my sources of refreshment, of hope, and of salvation, are in thee, O Zion!” He adds, “The phrase, *wells of salvation*, occurs in Isaiah 12:3, the Hebrew word being the same as that which, in our two English versions of the Psalms, is translated *springs* and *fountains*.” Walford connects the two clauses in the same manner, “They sing with musical instruments, ‘All my springs are in thee.’” “The persons who are here said to sing,” he observes, “accompanied by musical instruments, are the people spoken of in verse 6. They are described as uniting in a joyful song of praise and thanksgiving; and the burden of their song is, ‘All my springs are in thee.’ Springs or fountains are a constant image for the blessings which are productive of refreshment and happiness. These new-born converts are, therefore, represented as joining the universal Church, and offering ascriptions of praise to God, who is the overflowing source of all the streams of good, which refresh and bless the people.”

<sup>504</sup> “Afin que les fideles en chantant Pseaumes et Cantiques monstrent la souvenance qu'ils ont des benefices receus, et luy en facent reconnaissance.” — *Fr.*

## PSALM 88

This psalm contains very grievous lamentations, poured forth by its inspired penman when under very severe affliction, and almost at the point of despair. But he, at the same time, whilst struggling with sorrow, declares the invincible steadfastness of his faith; which he displayed in calling upon God to deliver him, even when he was in the, deep darkness of death.<sup>505</sup>

***A Song or Psalm of the sons of Korah. To the chief musician upon Machalath, to make humble. An instruction of Heman, the Ezrahite.***

Heman, whose name appears in the inscription, is probably the same person who is mentioned in sacred history, 1 Kings 4:31, where Solomon, when commended for his wisdom, is compared with Ethan, Heman, Chalcol, and Darda.<sup>506</sup> It is, therefore, not surprising that a man, so highly distinguished by the spirit of wisdom, was the author of this psalm. Some translate *al-machalath, upon infirmity*;<sup>507</sup> but it is probable, according to the ordinary use of the word, that it denotes either some instrument of music, or the beginning of some song.<sup>508</sup> Of the other words I have already sufficiently spoken elsewhere. Moreover, it is of importance to bear in mind, that in the person of one man there is presented to our view an example at once of rare affliction and of singular patience. God, in so sorely exercising Heman, whom he had adorned with such excellent gifts to be an example to others, did not do this for the sake of his servant only. His object was to present common matter of instruction to all his people. Carrying out this object, Heman ascending, as it were, an elevated stage, testifies to the whole Church his infirmities as well as his faith and constancy. It greatly concerns us to look upon such a distinguished servant of God, and one who was so eminently adorned with the graces of the Holy Spirit, thus overwhelmed with so heavy a

<sup>505</sup> “As well the singers as players, or dancers, shall be there; *i e.*, the whole chorus of joy and praise. Dr Chandler renders it, ‘They shall sing like those that lead up the dance;’ *i e.*, with joy and exultation.” — *Williams Symmachus and Aquila* translate the text:— ...Και ἄδοντες ὡς χωροί, πασαι πηγαι εν σοι: “And they shall sing as in leading up a dance; ‘All my fountains are in thee.’”

<sup>506</sup> There are various opinions as to the occasion of the composition of this psalm. Dr Kennicott conceives it to be the prayer of a person shut up in a separate house because of the leprosy, who seems to have been in the last stage of that distemper; this disease, under the Mosaic dispensation, having been supposed to come from the immediate stroke of God. Kimchi is of opinion that it was written in the name of the Jewish people during the captivity, in the language of a poor slave under his chains. Bishop Patrick supposes that Heman, the author of it, was during the same period cast into a dark prison, (see verses 5, 6,) or, that he was otherwise as miserably treated, as if he had been in a dungeon; and that he here bewails his private calamity.

<sup>507</sup> The Heman mentioned in that text has been supposed by some to be the son of Zerah, one of Judah’s sons, by his daughter-in-law Tamar, spoken of in 1 Chronicles 2:6. If these two passages refer to the same persons, then as the grandchildren of Judah are called in 1 Kings 4:31, the sons of Mahol, it would follow that Mahol was either another name of Zerah or the name of his wife. If this Heman was the author of the psalm before us, and if Ethan, his brother, wrote the subsequent psalm, as they lived at least one hundred and seventy years before Moses, these poems are the oldest poetical compositions extant, and the most ancient part of divine revelation. This, however, is far from being certain. Heman, the grandson of Judah, may have been the author of the 78th psalm; but the 79th could not have been written by Ethan, his brother, as it speaks of transactions that took place long after his time, at least as late as the days of David, who is particularly mentioned in it. Calvin obviously considers this Heman to have lived in the time of David or Solomon. There is a person of the same name who was constituted by David one of the chiefs of the sacred singers, 1 Chronicles 25:1. But he was a Levite, whereas the present Heman is called an Ezrahite, which is understood to denote a descendant from Zerah, the son of Judah. If, therefore, the chief musician in the time of David be intended, some transcriber must have erroneously applied to him the term *Ezrahite*. But if the psalm, as is supposed by many, was written during the Babylonish captivity, it must have been written by a different person.

<sup>508</sup> Street renders the title, “An instructive psalm in sickness, through affliction, by Aiman, the Ezrahite.” He observes, “ *sickness*, is used, Exodus 23:25. The word *aiman*, is the construct form of it.” He adds — “The title thus translated agrees with the matter contained in the psalm.”

burden of afflictions as made him mournfully complain that he differed nothing from a dead man, — it greatly concerns us, I say, to look on this spectacle, that our distresses, however grievous, may not overwhelm us with despair; or if we should at times be ready to faint through weariness, care, grief, sorrow, or fear, that we may not on that account despond, especially when we see that it is not without the highest effort that the holy prophet emerges from this profound darkness into the cheering light of hope. We should rather rest assured that the Spirit of God, by the mouth of Heman, has here furnished us with a form of prayer for encouraging all the afflicted who are, as it were, on the brink of despair to come to himself.

### Psalm 88:1-5

**1.** O Jehovah! God of my salvation! I cry day and night before thee. **2.** Let my prayer come into thy presence: incline thy ear to my cry; **3.** For my soul is filled with troubles; and my life is drawing near to the grave. **4.** I am numbered with them that go down to the pit: I have been as a man who hath no strength: **5.** Free among the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more, and who are cut off from thy hand.

**1** *O Jehovah! God of my salvation!* Let me call upon you particularly to notice what I have just now stated, that although the prophet simply, and without hyperbole, recites the agony which he suffered from the greatness of his sorrows, yet his purpose was at the same time to supply the afflicted with a form of prayer that they might not faint under any adversities, however severe, which might befall them. We will hear him by and by bursting out into vehement complaints on account of the grievousness of his calamities; but he seasonably fortifies himself by this brief exordium, lest, carried away with the heat of his feelings, he might become chargeable with complaining and murmuring against God, instead of humbly supplicating Him for pardon. By applying to Him the appellation of *the God of his salvation*, casting, as it were, a bridle upon himself, he restrains the excess of his sorrow, shuts the door against despair, and strengthens and prepares himself for the endurance of the cross. When he speaks of his crying and importunity, he indicates the earnestness of soul with which he engaged in prayer. He may not, indeed, have given utterance to loud cries; but he uses the word *cry*, with much *propriety*, to denote the great earnestness of his prayers. The same thing is implied when he tells us that he continued crying *days and nights*. Nor are the words *before thee* superfluous. It is common for all men to complain when under the pressure of grief; but they are far from pouring out their groanings before God. Instead of this, the majority of mankind court retirement, that they may murmur against him, and accuse him of undue severity; while others pour forth their cries into the air at random. Hence we gather that it is a rare virtue to set God before our eyes, that we may address our prayers to him.

**3** *For my soul is filled with troubles.* These words contain the excuse which the prophet pleads for the excess of his grief. They imply that his continued crying did not proceed from softness or effeminacy of spirit, but that from a due consideration of his condition, it would be found that the immense accumulation of miseries with which he was oppressed was such as might justly extort from him these lamentations. Nor does he speak of one kind of calamity only; but of calamities so heaped one upon another that his heart was filled with sorrow, till it could contain no more. He next particularly affirms that his life was not far from the grave. This idea he pursues and expresses in terms more significant in the following verse, where he complains that he *was*, as it were, dead. Although he breathed still among the living, yet the many deaths with which he was threatened on

all sides were to him so many graves by which he expected to be swallowed up in a moment. And he seems to use the word , *geber*, which is derived from , *gabar*, *he prevailed*, or *was strong*,<sup>509</sup> in preference to the word which simply signifies *man*, — the more emphatically to show that his distresses were so great and crushing as to have been sufficient to bring down the strongest man.

5 *Free among the dead, lie the slain who lie in the grave.* The prophet intended to express something more distressing and grievous than common death. First, he says, that *he was free among the dead*, because he was rendered unfit for all the business which engages human life, and, as it were, cut off from the world. The refined interpretation of Augustine, that Christ is here described, and that he is said to be free among the dead, because he obtained the victory over death by a special privilege, that it might not have dominion over him, has no connection with the meaning of the passage.<sup>510</sup> The prophet is rather to be understood as affirming, that having finished the course of this present life, his mind had become disengaged from all worldly solicitude; his afflictions having deprived him of all feeling.<sup>511</sup> In the next place, comparing himself with *those who have been wounded*, he bewails his condition as worse than if, enfeebled by calamities, he were going down to death by little and little; for we are naturally inspired with horror at the prospect of a violent death.

What he adds, that *he is forgotten of God, and cut off from his hand or guardianship*, is apparently harsh and improper, since it is certain that the dead are no less under the Divine protection than the living. Even wicked Balaam, whose purpose it was to turn light into darkness, was, nevertheless, constrained to cry out,

“Let me die the death of the righteous,  
and let my last end be like his,” (Numbers 23:10.)

To say, then, that God is no longer mindful of man after he is dead, might seem to be the language of a heathen. To this it may be answered, That the prophet speaks according to the opinion of the generality of men; just as the Scriptures, in like manner, when treating of the providence of God, accommodate their style to the state of the world as presented to the eye, because our thoughts ascend only by slow degrees to the future and invisible world. I, however, think, that he rather gave utterance to those confused conceptions which arise in the mind of a man under affliction, than that he had an eye to the opinion of the ignorant and uninstructed part of mankind. Nor is it wonderful that a man endued with the Spirit of God was, as it were, so stunned and stupified when sorrow overmastered him, as to allow unadvised words to escape from his lips. Although faith in the truth that God extends his care both to the living and the dead is deeply rooted in the hearts of all his genuine servants, yet sorrow often so overclouds their minds as to exclude from them for the time all remembrance of his providence. From perusing the complaints of Job, we may perceive, that

<sup>509</sup> See volume 2, page 320, note 2. Some consider the words , *Machalath Leannoth*, which Calvin renders “Machalath, to make humble,” as together denoting an instrument of music. “For my part,” says Dr Morison, “I lean to the idea that these words are intended to denote some musical instrument of the plaintive order; and in this opinion Kimchi and other Jewish writers perfectly agree. They assert that it was a wind-instrument, answering very much to the flute, and employed mainly in giving utterance to sentiments of grief, upon occasions of great sorrow and lamentation.”

<sup>510</sup> *geber*, therefore, denotes a *man* “when in vigorous manhood; who is neither a boy nor an old man, yet it is applied to Balaam, when old, in Numbers 24:4.” — *Bythner*

<sup>511</sup> “‘Free among the dead,’ *inter mortuos liber*,” says Dr Adam Clarke, “has been applied by the Fathers to our Lord’s voluntary death: all others were *obliged* to die; He alone *gave up his life*, and could take it again, (John 10:18.) He went into the grave and came out when he *chose*. The dead are *bound* in the grave: *He was free*, and not obliged to continue in that state as they were.”

when the minds of the godly are preoccupied with sorrow, they do not immediately pierce to the consideration of the secret providence of God, which yet has been before the subject of their careful meditation, and the truth of which they bear engraven on their hearts. Although the prophet, then, was persuaded that the dead also are under the Divine protection, yet, in the first paroxysm of his grief, he spoke less advisedly than he ought to have done; for the light of faith was, as it were, extinguished in him, although, as we shall see, it soon after shone forth. This it will be highly useful particularly to observe, that, should we be at any time weakened by temptation, we may, nevertheless, be kept from falling into despondency or despair.

### Psalm 88:6-9

**6.** Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in dark places, in the deeps. **7.** Thy indignation lieth heavy upon me; and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Selah. **8.** Thou hast removed my acquaintances from me: thou hast made me to be abhorred by them: I am shut up that I cannot go forth. **9.** My eye mourneth because of my affliction; I invoke thee, O Jehovah! daily: I stretch out my hands to thee.

**6** *Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit.* The Psalmist now acknowledges more distinctly, that whatever adversities he endured proceeded from the Divine hand. Nor indeed will any man sincerely betake himself to God to seek relief without a previous persuasion that it is the Divine hand which smites him, and that nothing happens by chance. It is observable that the nearer the prophet approaches God the more is his grief embittered; for nothing is more dreadful to the saints than the judgment of God.

Some translate the first clause of the 7th verse, *Thy indignation hath approached upon me*; and the Hebrew word , *samach*, is sometimes to be taken in this sense. But from the scope of the passage, it must necessarily be understood here, as in many other places, in the sense of *to surround*, or *to lie heavy upon*; for when the subject spoken of is a man sunk into a threefold grave, it would be too feeble to speak of the wrath of God as merely approaching him. The translation which I have adopted is peculiarly suitable to the whole drift of the text. It views the prophet as declaring, that he sustained the whole burden of God's wrath; seeing *he was afflicted with His waves*. Farther, as so dreadful a flood did not prevent him from lifting up his heart and prayers to God, we may learn from his example to cast the anchor of our faith and prayers direct into heaven in all the perils of shipwreck to which we may be exposed.

**8** *Thou hast removed my acquaintances from me.* He was now destitute of all human aid, and *that* also he attributes to the anger of God, in whose power it is either to bend the hearts of men to humanity, or to harden them, and render them cruel. This is a point well worthy of our attention; for unless we bear in mind that our destitution of human aid in any case is owing to God's withdrawing his hand, we agitate ourselves without end or measure. We may indeed justly complain of the ingratitude or cruelty of men whenever they defraud us of the just claims of duty which we have upon them; but still this will avail us nothing, unless we are thoroughly convinced that God, being displeased with us, takes away the means of help which he had destined for us; just as it is easy for him, whenever he pleases, to incline the hearts of all men to stretch forth their hand to

succor us. The prophet, as an additional and still more grievous element in his distressed condition, tells us that his friends *abhorred him*.<sup>512</sup> Finally, he concludes by observing, that he could perceive no way of escape from his calamities: *I am shut up that I cannot go forth*.<sup>513</sup>

**9.** *My eye mourneth because of my affliction.* To prevent it from being supposed that he was iron-hearted, he again repeats that his afflictions were so severe and painful as to produce manifest traces of his sorrow, even in his countenance and eyes — a plain indication of the low condition to which he was reduced. But he, notwithstanding, testifies that he was not drawn away from God, like many who, secretly murmuring in their hearts, and, to use a proverbial expression, chafing upon the bit, have nothing farther from their thoughts than to disburden their cares into the bosom of God, in order to derive comfort from Him. In speaking of *the stretching out of his hands*, he puts the sign for the thing signified. I have elsewhere had an opportunity of explaining the import of this ceremony, which has been in common use in all ages.

### Psalm 88:10-13

**10.** Wilt thou perform a miracle for the dead? shall the dead<sup>514</sup> arise to praise thee? Selah. **11.** Shall thy loving kindness be declared in the grave? thy truth in destruction?<sup>515</sup> **12.** Shall thy wonders be known in darkness? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? **13.** But to thee have I cried, O Jehovah! and in the morning my prayer shall come before thee.<sup>516</sup>

<sup>512</sup> This verse has been supposed to contain a reference to the condition of the leper under the law, which much resembled the picture here drawn. *chophshi*, from *chophash*, “is free,” says Hammond, (“in opposition to *servitude*,) *manumitted, set at liberty* The use of this word may more generally be taken from 2 Chronicles 26:21, where of Uzziah, being a leper, it is said, that he dwelt, ‘in an house of freedom, for he was cut off from the house of the Lord.’ The meaning is, that after the manner of the lepers, he was excluded from the temple, and dwelt, saith the Chaldee, there, in some place without Jerusalem, which is therefore called the ‘house of freedom,’ because such as were there were exempt from the common affairs, and shut up from the conversation of men. And in comparison with these, they that are, as it were, dead and laid in their graves, are here said to be free, *i. e.*, removed from all the affairs and conversation of the world.”

<sup>513</sup> “This verse,” observes Dr Adam Clarke, “has been supposed to express the state of a leper, who, because of the infectious nature of his disease, is separated from his family, — is abominable to all, and at last shut up in a separate house, whence he does not come out to mingle with society.” “Heman means,” says Walford, “either that the character of his disease was such that men could not endure to be near him, or that the state of his mind was so disordered that he became wearisome and intolerable; perhaps he includes both.”

<sup>514</sup> According to Cresswell, the meaning of this clause is, “That the Psalmist confined himself to his house from the fear of encountering, if he were abroad, the revilings of his former friends.” Walford explains it as follows — “Either his state of feeling was such as induced him to withdraw himself altogether from society, or he was so environed by hopeless misery, that he regarded himself as a wretch confined in a dungeon, whence he could not escape.” Horsley reads, “I am shut up apart, and am not permitted to come out.” He observes, that *shut up apart* is the proper sense of *methim*, and adds, that “when it denotes confinement, it always implies solitary confinement.”

<sup>515</sup> The Hebrew word for *the dead*, in the first clause of the verse, is *methim*; here it is *rephaim* This last “Hebrew word,” says Parkhurst, “means ‘dead bodies reduced,’ or ‘resolved into their original dust.’ I know not (he adds) of any one English word that will express it: *remains*, or relics, come as near to it as any that I can recollect. It is several times put after ‘the dead,’ as of more intense signification.” (See Parkhurst’s Lexicon, 2.) “Mortui, qui vivere desierunt, manes, proprie *flaccidi*.” — *Simonis* According to Dr Adam Clarke, *rephaim*, means “the manes or departed spirits.” The Chaldee paraphrases this word “the carcasses that are putrefied in the dust.”

<sup>516</sup> “C’est, la mort.” — *Fr. marg.* “That is, death.”

**10.** *Wilt thou perform a miracle for the dead?* By these words the prophet intimates, that God, if he did not make haste to succor him, would be too late, there being scarce anything betwixt him and death; and that therefore this was the critical juncture, if God was inclined to help him, for should the present opportunity not be embraced another would not occur. He asks how long God meant to delay, — if he meant to do so till death intervened, that he might raise the dead by a miracle? He does not speak of the resurrection at the last day, which will surpass all other miracles, as if he called it in question; yet he cannot be vindicated from the charge of going to excess, for it does not belong to us to prescribe to God the season of succouring us. We impeach his power if we believe not that it is as easy for him to restore life to the dead as to prevent, in proper season, the extreme danger which may threaten us from actually lighting upon us. Great as has been the constancy of the saints, it has always had some mixture of the infirmity of the flesh, which has rendered it necessary for God, in the exercise of his fatherly clemency, to bear with the sin with which even their very virtues have been to a degree contaminated. When the Psalmist asks, *Shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave?* he does not mean that the dead are devoid of consciousness; but he pursues the same sentiment which he had previously stated, That it is a more seasonable time to succor men, whilst in the midst of danger they are as yet crying, than to raise them up from their graves when they are dead. He reasons from what ordinarily happens; it not being God's usual way to bring the dead out of their graves to be witnesses and publishers of his goodness. To God's *loving-kindness* or *mercy* he annexes his *truth* or *faithfulness*; for when God delivers his servants he gives a confirmation of his faithfulness to his promises. And, on the other hand, he is influenced to make his promises by nothing but his own pure goodness. When the prophet affirms, that the divine faithfulness as well as the divine goodness, power, and righteousness, *are not known in the land of forgetfulness*, some deluded persons foolishly wrest the statement to support a gross error, as if it taught that men were annihilated by death. He speaks only of the ordinary manner in which help is extended by God, who has designed this world to be as a stage on which to display his goodness towards mankind.

**13.** *But to thee have I cried, O Jehovah!* There may have been a degree of intemperateness in the language of the prophet, which, as I have granted, cannot be altogether vindicated; but still it was a sign of rare faith and piety to persevere as he did with never-failing earnestness in prayer. This is what is meant when he says, that *he made haste in the morning*; by which he would have us not to imagine that he slowly and coldly lingered till he was constrained by dire necessity. At the same time, he modestly intimates by these words, that his pining away in long continued miseries was not owing to his own sluggishness, as if he had not sought God. This is an example particularly worthy of notice, that we may not become discouraged if it happen sometimes that our prayers are for a time unsuccessful, although they may proceed from the heart, and may be assiduously persevered in.

### Psalm 88:14-18

**14.** Wherefore, O Jehovah! wilt thou reject my soul? and hide thy face from me? **15.** I am afflicted, and ready to die from my youth; I have suffered thy terrors by doubting. **16.** Thy wraths have passed over me: thy terrors have cut me off. **17.** They have daily encompassed me like waters:



they have surrounded me together. **18.** Thou hast put far from me friend and companion: and my acquaintances are darkness. <sup>517</sup>

**14.** *Wherefore, O Jehovah! wilt thou reject my soul?* These lamentations at first sight would seem to indicate a state of mind in which sorrow without any consolation prevailed; but they contain in them tacit prayers. The Psalmist does not proudly enter into debate with God, but mournfully desires some remedy to his calamities. This kind of complaint justly deserves to be reckoned among the unutterable groanings of which Paul makes mention in Romans 8:26. Had the prophet thought himself rejected and abhorred by God, he certainly would not have persevered in prayer. But here he sets forth the judgment of the flesh, against which he strenuously and magnanimously struggled, that it might at length be manifest from the result that he had not prayed in vain. Although, therefore, this psalm does not end with thanksgiving, but with a mournful complaint, as if there remained no place for mercy, yet it is so much the more useful as a means of keeping us in the duty of prayer. The prophet, in heaving these sighs, and discharging them, as it were, into the bosom of God, doubtless ceased not to hope for the salvation of which he could see no signs by the eye of sense. He did not call God, at the opening of the psalm, *the God of his salvation*, and then bid farewell to all hope of succor from him.

The reason why he says that *he was ready to die* <sup>518</sup> *from his youth*, (verse 15,) is uncertain, unless it may be considered a probable conjecture that he was severely tried in a variety of ways, so that his life, as it were, hung by a thread amidst various tremblings and fears. Whence also we gather that *God's wraths and terrors*, of which he speaks in the 16th verse, were not of short continuance. He expresses them in the 17th verse as having encompassed him *daily*. Since nothing is more dreadful than to conceive of God as angry with us, he not improperly compares his distress to a flood. Hence also proceeded his *doubting*. <sup>519</sup> for a sense of the divine anger must necessarily have agitated his mind with sore disquietude. But it may be asked, How can this wavering agree with faith? It is true, that when the heart is in perplexity and doubt, or rather is tossed hither and thither, faith seems to be swallowed up. But experience teaches us, that faith, while it fluctuates amidst these agitations, continues to rise again from time to time, so as not to be overwhelmed; and if at any time it is at the point of being stifled, it is nevertheless sheltered and cherished, for though the tempests may become never so violent, it shields itself from them by reflecting that God continues faithful, and never disappoints or forsakes his own children.

<sup>517</sup> *Or prevent thee* — Come before the usual hour of morning prayer. — See Mark 1:35.

<sup>518</sup> “C'est, se cachent.” — *Fr. marg.* “That is, hide themselves.” Walford reads, “The darkness of death is my associate;” on which he has the following note: — “*The darkness of death*. I take this literally to mean, ‘My acquaintance, or he that knoweth me, is darkness personified:’ — orcus, abaddon.”

<sup>519</sup> The original word for “ready to die” is *goveang*. It is literally, *I labour, or pant for breath, I breathe with pain and difficulty*, as a person in great affliction and distress. The verb sometimes signifies *to expire*; but it does not so strictly express as imply *death*, from the obstruction of breathing that accompanies it. (See Parkhurst's Lexicon, , 1, 2.)

## PSALM 89

The prophet who wrote this psalm, whoever he was, in approaching the throne of grace to make supplication to God in behalf of the afflicted Church, lays down, as an encouragement both to himself and the rest of the faithful to cherish good hope, the covenant which God had made with David. He then adverts in general to the Divine power which is discerned in the whole government of the world. And next, he calls to remembrance the redemption in which God had given an everlasting testimony of his fatherly love towards his chosen people. Thence, he again returns to the covenant made with David, in which God had promised to continue his favor towards that people for ever, for the sake of their king. Finally, he subjoins a complaint that God, as if he had forgotten his covenant, abandoned his Church to the will of her enemies, and, in the midst of strange disaster and mournful desolation, withheld all succor and consolation.

### *An instruction of Ethan, the Ezrahite.*

Who this Ethan was, to whom this psalm is ascribed, is somewhat uncertain. If we should consider him to have been one of the four eminent men to whom Solomon is compared for his distinguished wisdom, (1 Kings 4:31) <sup>520</sup> the argument or subject of the poem will not agree with his time; unless we suppose him to have survived Solomon, and bewailed the sad and mournful division which occurred after the death of that monarch, and which proved the commencement and prelude of future ruin. The people, it is true, after being divided into two kingdoms, continued still to exist safe as before; but as that rupture dissolved the unity established by God, what ground of hope could any longer remain? Besides, the prosperity and welfare of the whole body depended upon their having one head, from their allegiance to whom the ten tribes had wickedly revolted. What a horrible spectacle was it to behold that kingdom, which might have flourished in unimpaired vigor, even to the end of the world, disfigured and miserably rent asunder, at the close of the life of one man! Who would not have thought that the holy oracle was deceptive and vain, the truth of which seemed to be overthrown in so short a time? If, therefore, the Ethan above referred to should be regarded as the author of this psalm, the complaints contained in it must be applied to that period, in which not only the throne of David was weakened, but in which also the great mass of the people apostatised from God, while those who were brethren proceeded to work each other's ruin by mutual and intestine discord. This certainly appears to me to be the most probable conjecture in this doubtful case. Some think that the author, speaking under the influence of the Spirit of prophecy, predicts the calamities which were to befall the people: but this opinion may be easily refuted by the context itself, where the inspired bard expressly bewails the first unhappy alteration which took place in the kingdom, in consequence of the conspiracy of Jeroboam.

### **Psalm 89:1-4**

**1.** I will sing of the mercies of Jehovah for ever: with my mouth will I celebrate thy truth from generation to generation. **2.** For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: thou shalt establish the heavens, thy truth is in them. <sup>521</sup> **3.** I have made a covenant with my chosen: I have sworn to

<sup>520</sup> The Hebrew verb for "doubting" is, *aphunah* It means "to turn this way and that," as a person in great distress, not knowing, as we say, which way to turn himself. (See Parkhurst's Lexicon, , 8.)

<sup>521</sup> The Ethan celebrated in that passage, according to some, is the same person who is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 2:6, as the grandson of Judah. (See page 406, note 2.) But that this psalm could not have been written by him is evident, as we have there

David my servant, **4.** I will establish thy seed for ever, and will build up thy throne from age to age. Selah.

**1** *I will sing of the mercies of Jehovah for ever.* It must be borne in mind, as I have just now observed, that the Psalmist opens with the praises of God, and with calling to mind the Divine covenant, to encourage the faithful to strengthen their faith against the formidable assaults of temptation. If when we set about the duty of prayer some despairing thought, at the very outset, presents itself to us, we must forcibly and resolutely break through it, lest our hearts faint and utterly fail. The design of the prophet, therefore, was to fortify the minds of the godly at the very commencement, with stable and substantial supports, that, relying on the Divine promise, which, to outward appearance, had almost fallen to the ground, and repelling all the assaults of temptation with which their faith was severely shaken, they might with confidence hope for the re-establishment of the kingdom, and continue perseveringly to pray for this blessing. From the sad spectacle of begun decay,<sup>522</sup> which Ethan beheld, listening to the dictates of carnal reason, he might have thought that both himself and the rest of God's believing people were deceived; but he expresses his determination to celebrate the mercies of God which at that time were hidden from his view. And as it was no easy matter for him to apprehend and acknowledge the merciful character of God, of whose severity he had actual experience, he uses the plural number, *the Mercies of God*, that by reflecting on the abundance and variety of the blessings of Divine grace he might overcome this temptation.

**2** *For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever.* He assigns the reason why he perseveres in singing the Divine praises in the midst of adversities; which is, that he does not despair of the manifestation of God's loving-kindness towards his people, although at present they were under severe chastisement. Never will a man freely open his mouth to praise God, unless he is fully persuaded that God, even when he is angry with his people, never lays aside his fatherly affection towards them. The words *I have said*, imply that the truth which the inspired writer propounds was deeply fixed in his heart.<sup>523</sup> Whatever, as if he had said, has hitherto happened, it has never had the effect of effacing from my heart the undoubted hope of experiencing the Divine favor as to the future, and I will always continue steadfastly to cherish the same feeling. It is to be observed, that it was not without a painful and arduous conflict that he succeeded in embracing by faith the goodness of God, which at that time had entirely vanished out of sight; — this we say is to be particularly noticed, in order that when God at any time withdraws from us all the tokens of his love, we may nevertheless learn to erect in our hearts *that everlasting building of mercy*, which is here spoken of, — a metaphor, by which is meant that the Divine mercy shall be extended, or shall

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observed, from several allusions contained in it to events which happened even posterior to the days of David. A person of this name was one of the chief musicians in the time of David, (1 Chronicles 25:1.) but he was a Levite; whereas this Ethan is called an Ezrahite. Nichols thinks it probable that the author, like Heman, was of the family of Zerah, and wrote this psalm during the captivity, most likely in the time of Jehoiakim, whose misfortunes he seems here to describe in a spirit of despondency, notwithstanding the promises made to David.

<sup>522</sup> Ainsworth's translation of this last clause is both literal and elegant. "The heavens, thou wilt establish thy faithfulness in them." Dr Kennicott, in his Remarks on Select Passages of the Old Testament, here refers to verses 37, 38, "where," says he, "it appears that the sun, the moon, and the bow in the sky, were the tokens of confirmation given by God to the covenant made with David." "The meaning of this passage," says Warner, "appears to be, that the constancy of the celestial motions, the regular vicissitudes of day and night, and alternations of the seasons, were emblems of God's own immutability."

<sup>523</sup> "Ex tristi ruinae spectaculo." — *Lat.* "Voyant ce commencement pitoyable d'une ruine." — *Fr.*

continue till it reach its end or consummation. In the second clause of the verse something must be supplied. The sense, in short, is, that the Divine promise is no less stable than the settled course of the heavens, which is eternal and exempt from all change. By the word *heavens* I understand not only the visible skies, but the heavens which are above the whole frame of the world; for the truth of God, in the heavenly glory of his kingdom, is placed above all the elements of the world.

**3** *I have made a covenant with my chosen.* <sup>524</sup> The more effectually to confirm himself and all the godly in the faith of the Divine promise, he introduces God himself as speaking and sanctioning, by his authority, what had been said in the preceding verse. As faith ought to depend on the Divine promise, this manner of speaking, by which God is represented as coming forward and alluring us to himself by his own voice, is more forcible than if the prophet himself had simply stated the fact. And when God in this way anticipates us, we cannot be charged with rashness in coming familiarly to him; even as, on the contrary, without His word we have no ground to presume that he will be gracious to us, or to hope, at the mere suggestion of our own fancy, for what he has not promised. Moreover, the truth of the promise is rendered still more irrefragable, when God declares that he had made a covenant with his servant David, ratified by his own solemn oath. It having been customary in ancient times to engrave leagues and covenants on tables of brass, a metaphor is here used borrowed from this practice. God applies to David two titles of distinction, calling him both *his chosen* and *his servant*. Those who would refer the former appellation to Abraham do not sufficiently attend to the style of the Book of Psalms, in which it is quite common for one thing to be repeated twice. David is called *the chosen of God*, because God of his own good pleasure, and from no other cause, preferred him not only to the posterity of Saul, and many distinguished personages, but even to his own brethren. If, therefore, the cause or origin of this covenant is sought for, we must necessarily fall back upon the Divine election.

The name of *servant*, which follows immediately after, is not to be understood as implying that David by his services merited any thing at the hand of God. He is called *God's servant* in respect of the royal dignity, into which he had not rashly thrust himself, having been invested with the government by God, and having undertaken it in obedience to his lawful call. When, however, we consider what the covenant summarily contains, we conclude that the prophet has not improperly applied it to his own use, and to the use of the whole people; for God did not enter into it with David individually, but had an eye to the whole body of the Church, which would exist from age to age. The sentence, *I will establish thy throne for ever*, is partly to be understood of Solomon, and the rest of David's successors; but the prophet well knew that perpetuity or everlasting duration, in the strict and proper sense, could be verified only in Christ. In ordaining one man to be king, God assuredly did not have a respect to one house alone, while he forgot and neglected the people with whom he had before made his covenant in the person of Abraham; but he conferred the sovereign power upon David and his children, that they might rule for the common good of all the rest, until the throne might be truly established by the advent of Christ.

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<sup>524</sup> “The word , ‘I have said,’ is used, in the Book of Psalms, to express two things; either a fixed purpose, or a settled opinion of the person speaking. The Psalmist, therefore, delivers the whole of this second verse in his own person, and introduces not God speaking till the next verse.” — *Horsley*

## Psalm 89:5-8

**5.** And the heavens shall praise thy wondrous work, O Jehovah! thy truth <sup>525</sup> also in the congregation of the saints. **6.** For who in the clouds [or in heaven] can be compared to Jehovah? who among the sons of the gods <sup>526</sup> is like to Jehovah? **7.** God is very terrible <sup>527</sup> in the assembly of the saints, and to be feared above all who are around him. **8.** O Jehovah! God of Hosts, who is a strong God as thou art? and thy truth is round about thee.

**5.** *And the heavens shall praise thy wondrous work.* The prophet, having spoken of God's covenant, even as faith ought to begin at the word, now descends to a general commendation of his works. It is, however, to be observed, that when he treats of the wonderful power of God, he has no other end in view than to exalt and magnify more highly the holiness of the covenant. He exclaims, that this is the God who has rightful claims to be served and feared, who ought to be believed, and upon whose power the most unhesitating confidence may be reposed. The words *wondrous work*, in the first clause, I would therefore limit to the power which God displays in preserving and maintaining his Church. The heavens, it is true, are most excellent witnesses and preachers of God's wonderful power; but from attending to the scope of the passage, it will be still more evident, that the encomiums here pronounced have all a special reference to the end of which I have spoken. Some interpreters judiciously explain the word *heavens*, of the angels, among whom there is a common joy and congratulation in the salvation of the Church. This interpretation is confirmed from the last clause of the verse, in which it is asserted, that *God's truth will be celebrated in the congregation of the saints*. There is no doubt, that the same subject is here prosecuted, and that by the word *truth*, it is intended to signalise the remarkable deliverances by which God had manifested his faithfulness to the promises made to his servants.

**6** *For who in the clouds can be compared to Jehovah?* The prophet now proceeds to illustrate farther what he had said respecting God's wonders, and exclaims emphatically, *Who in the clouds can be compared to God?* The reason why he speaks of *the clouds*, or *heaven*, is because, what is not surprising, nothing is to be found upon the earth which can at all approach the glory of God. Although man excels other living creatures, yet we see how contemptible and miserable his condition is, or rather, how full it is of shame and reproach. Whence it follows, that under heaven there is no excellence which can compete with that of God. But when we ascend to heaven, immediately ravished with admiration, we conceive of a multitude of gods, which do away with the true God. The last clause of the verse, in which it is said, *that among the sons of the gods there is none like*

<sup>525</sup> "Comp. 2 Samuel 7:11, etc. In 5:3 and 5:4, the Psalmist introduces God as speaking on a subject which he resumes in 5:34; so that the intervening verses may be considered as parenthetical." — *Cresswell*.

<sup>526</sup> " — *and thy truth*" — Le Clerc thinks that the word *men* should here be supplied, *and men thy truth*; in which case, the congregation of the saints will have its proper meaning — an assembly of the pious upon earth; and the Psalmist thus describes both angels and men as praising God." — *Cresswell*.

<sup>527</sup> "Literally *who is he among the sons of Alim*, (or of Gods, as in Psalm 29:1,) *i.e.*, according to Suicer, the powerful, the princes of the earth. *Ale*, in the singular number, is used to signify God in Deuteronomy 32:17; Job 3:4, 23, (and in other places of that book;) Daniel 11:38; Habakkak 3:3. But it may be doubted whether its plural, *Alim*, ever means, as *Aleim* does, the true God. We have, however, *the sons of Aleim*, for *chief men*, in Genesis 6:2, and for angels in Job 1:6; in which sense some commentators have understood *the sons of Alim* both here and in Psalm 29:1, and with them agrees the Chaldee interpreter of this place. In Habakkak 1:11, *Ale* is used in speaking of the false god of the Chaldeans; and Parkhurst is of opinion, that by *the sons of Alim* are meant those kings who worshipped material divinities, such as the sun." — *Cresswell*.

*the true and only God*, is an explanation of the first. The opinion of some, that by *the clouds*, or *the heavens*, is to be understood the sun, moon, and stars, is disproved by the context itself. The amount then is, that even in the heavens, God alone has the entire pre-eminence, having there none as a companion or equal. The appellation *the sons of the gods* is here given to angels, because they neither have their origin from the earth, nor are clothed with a corruptible body, but are celestial spirits, adorned with a Divine glory. It is not meant that they are a part of the Divine essence or substance, as some fanatics dream; but as God displays his power in them, this title is attributed to them, to distinguish between their nature and ours. In short, although a greater majesty shines forth in the angels than in other creatures, at the contemplation of which we are ravished with admiration, yet come they not near God, so as to obscure and impair his glory by their excellence, or to share with him in the sovereignty of the universe. This is a point worthy of our careful attention; for, although God everywhere declares in his word that the angels are only his servants, and always ready to execute his commands, yet the world, not contented with having only one God, forges for itself a countless number of deities.

To the same effect is the following verse, in which it is affirmed, that *God is very terrible in the assembly of the saints*. In these words is censured that devilish superstition, to which almost all men are prone, of exalting angels beyond measure, and without reason. But if the angels themselves tremble, and are afraid before the Divine Majesty, why should they not be regarded as subjects, and kept in their own rank, that God alone may have the sovereignty entirely to himself? Farther, when they are represented as *around God*, the meaning is, that they surround his royal throne like body-guards, and are always ready to execute his behests. In the subsequent verse the same thing is repeated yet again, *Who is a strong God as thou art?* and this is done, that at least the fear of the Divine Majesty may teach us to beware of robbing him of the honor which belongs to him. That we may not, however, by too much fear, be prevented from approaching him, some portion of sweetness is intermingled with this description, when it is declared, that *his truth is to be seen round about him on all sides*; by which we are to understand, that God is always steadfast in his promises, and that whatever changes may happen, he nevertheless continues invariably true, both before and behind, on the right hand and on the left.<sup>528</sup>

## Psalm 89:9-14

**9.** Thou governest the pride of the sea: when the waves thereof rise up, thou restrainest them  
**10.** Thou hast overthrown Egypt, as a wounded man;<sup>529</sup> with thy mighty arm [literally, with the arm of thy strength] thou hast scattered thy enemies. **11.** The heavens are thine, the earth also is

<sup>528</sup> Ainsworth reads, "God is daunting terrible." The original word is *naarats*, from *arats*, *he was broken, bruised, terrified*. "An epithet of God," says Bythner "as though breaking all things."

<sup>529</sup> Hammond's explanation of the words, *And thy truth is round about thee*, conveys a striking and beautiful idea. "The elegance of the phrase (which is poetical) seems to be taken," says he, "from the style of angels, verse 7th, where they are described as they that encompass God; signifying, that as they wait upon God, and execute his will, so, far above the strength of those, God's fidelity, his care to perform his promise exactly encompasses him, is ready prest to perform all that he hath ever promised to do." — *Hammond*.

thine: thou hast made the world, and the fullness thereof. **12.** Thou hast created the north <sup>530</sup> and the south: <sup>531</sup> Tabor and Hermon <sup>532</sup> shall rejoice in thy name. **13.** Thou hast a mighty arm: thou wilt strengthen thy hand, thou wilt exalt thy right hand. **14.** Righteousness and judgment are the place of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.

**9.** *Thou governest the pride of the sea.* I have already observed that what the prophet has hitherto spoken generally concerning the power of God, is to be referred to the miracle of the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, which he now celebrates in express terms. According to the interpretation of some, God is said to still the impetuous waves of the sea, because he does not suffer it to break forth and overflow the whole world by a deluge. But I would read the 9th and 10th verses connectedly, and would understand the prophet as speaking of the Red Sea, which God divided to make a way for the chosen tribes to pass over. The Psalmist adds immediately after, that all *the land of Egypt was overthrown as a wounded man*. By these words he magnifies the grace of God, which was displayed in the deliverance of the Church. He intended, there can be no doubt, to set before his own mind and the minds of others, the paternal love of God, to encourage both himself and others to have recourse to Him for succor, with the greater freedom and alacrity. And in affirming that *God had broken in pieces his enemies with his mighty arm*, he concludes from the past experience of the Church, that his mode of acting will be always similar, whenever in his infinite wisdom he sees it to be required.

**11** *The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine.* He again repeats, the third time, that the same God who had been the deliverer of the chosen people exercises supreme dominion over the whole world. From the fact that God created all things, he concludes, that it is He who actually presides over, and controls whatever takes place in heaven and in earth. It would be absurd to suppose, that the heavens, having been once created by God, should now revolve by chance, and that things should be thrown into confusion upon the earth either at the will of men, or at random, when it is considered that it belongs to God to maintain and govern whatever he has created; unless, like the heathen, we would imagine that he enjoys himself in beholding all the works of his hand, in this beautiful theater of the heaven and the earth, without giving himself any farther trouble about them. In speaking of *the south* and *the north*, and also of the mountains, *Tabor* and *Hermon*, the prophet

<sup>530</sup> Horsley renders the clause thus: — Thou hast crushed Rahab, that she lies gasping with her wounds; and has the following note: — “The word ,” [for *lies gasping with her wounds*,] “as it is used here, and in Psalm 88:5, signifies not a dead carcass, but a person left for dead, under his wounds, upon the field of battle; a person so wounded, as to be fallen, and incapable of rising to defend himself, or annoy the enemy. It answers exactly to the Greek word, τραυματίας, by which the LXX. render it. We have no corresponding word in the English language.” Dr Adam Clarke reads, “Thou, like a hero, hast broken down Egypt;” and observes, “Dr Kennicott has largely proved, that , *chahal*, which we render *wounded, slain*, etc., means a *soldier, warrior, hero*; and it is certain that this sense agrees better with it than the other in a great number of places.”

<sup>531</sup> “The Hebrew word for ‘the north,’ is derived from a root signifying ‘to hide, conceal.’ The ‘north’ is probably so named; because in our northern hemisphere of the earth, the sun appears to move from east to south, and from south to west, and, towards mid-day, is at all times of the year southerly; whence the north side of a building, tree, or mountain, is usually ‘concealed’ or ‘hidden’ from his direct rays, and is, as we express it, in the shade. (See Parkhurst on , 4.) Simonis, also, assigns this as the reason of the name, in the judgment of some critics, or, in that of others, because the north is covered with snow, and of others again, with darkness; and so the Greek word for darkness, ζοφος, is continually used by Homer for the north: for the ancients thought that the north was always buried in gloom and thick darkness.” — *Mant*

<sup>532</sup> The original word , *yamin*, for “the south,” signifies literally “the right hand.” As the Hebrews, when they engaged in prayer, turned their faces eastward, they called the East , *the face*, and the West, , *the hinder part*. *The South*, therefore, would necessarily be *on their right hand*; and hence, , *yamin*, came to be used to denote *the south*

accommodates his language to the unrefined apprehension of the common people: as if he had said, there is no part of the fabric of the world which does not reverence and honor its Creator. I also connect with this the next verse, which affirms, that *the arm of God is furnished with power, his hand with strength, and that his right hand is exalted* Some resolve the two last clauses of the verse into the form of a prayer, *Strengthen thy hand, lift up thy right hand*; but this seems too much removed from the mind of the prophet, who, with the simple view of encouraging all the godly, celebrates the inconceivable power of God.

**14.** *Righteousness and judgement are the place of thy throne.* These encomiums serve more effectually to confirm the hope of true believers than if the Divine power alone had been presented to our view. Whenever mention is made of God, it behoves us to apply our minds principally to those attributes of his nature which are specially fitted for establishing our faith, that we may not lose ourselves by vainly indulging in subtle speculations, by which foolish men, although they may minister to their own mental recreation, make no advances to the right understanding of what God really is. The prophet, therefore, in allusion to the insignia and pomp of kings, declares that *righteousness and judgment* are the pillars of the throne on which God sits conspicuous in sovereign state, and that *mercy and truth* are, as it were, his pursuivants; as if he had said, “The ornaments with which God is invested, instead of being a robe of purple, a diadem, or a scepter, are, that he is the righteous and impartial judge of the world, a merciful father, and a faithful protector of his people.” Earthly kings, from their having nothing in themselves to procure for them authority, and to give them dignity,<sup>533</sup> are under the necessity of borrowing elsewhere what will invest them therewith; but God having in himself an all-sufficiency, and standing in no need of any other helps, exhibits to us the splendor of his own image in his righteousness, mercy, and truth.

### Psalm 89:15-18

**15.** Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound!<sup>534</sup> they shall walk, O Jehovah! in the brightness of thy countenance. **16.** In thy name shall they daily rejoice; and in thy righteousness shall they glory. **17.** For thou art the glory of their strength; and in thy favor shall our horn be exalted. **18.** For to Jehovah<sup>535</sup> is our buckler; and our King is to the Holy One of Israel.

**15.** *Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound.* Here the same train of reflection concerning the Church is pursued, not only because unbelievers are blind to the consideration of God’s works,

<sup>533</sup> *Tabor* is a mountain of Judea, and *Hermon* (Psalm 133:3) of Syria, the former to the west, and the latter to the east of the Jordan; so that they may be considered as put for the East and the West. Accordingly, the Chaldee paraphrase is, “Thou hast created the desert of the north, and the inhabitants of the south; Tabor on the west, and Hermon on the east, sing praises to thy name.” “These mountains,” says Warner, “were at a considerable distance from each other. This indicates, that the most distant parts of the land shall be equally blessed; have a like cause of rejoicing.”

<sup>534</sup> “Pource qu’ils n’ont rien au dedans qui leur acquiere autorite et donne majeste.” — *Fr.*

<sup>535</sup> “O the blessednesses of the people that know the joyful sound; that are spared to hear the sound of the trumpet on the morning of the jubilee, which proclaims deliverance to the captives, and the restoration of all their forfeited estates!” — *Dr Adam Clarke.* “But let us not forget,” says Dr Morison, “that the trumpet of jubilee was a type of the proclamation of peace and salvation by Jesus Christ. How happy they who, when the gospel trumpet is blown by the heralds of salvation, are enabled to recognize its joyful sound.”



but also because the prophet has no other purpose in view than to inspire the godly with good hope, that they may with confidence rely upon God, and not be discouraged by any adversities from boldly calling upon him. It is declared that those are happy to whom it is given to rejoice in God; for although all men in common are sustained and nourished by his liberality, yet the feeling of his paternal goodness is far from being experienced by all men in such a manner as to enable them, from a certain persuasion that he is favorable to them, to congratulate themselves upon their happy condition. It is, therefore, a singular privilege which he confers upon his chosen ones, to make them taste of his goodness, that thereby they may be encouraged to be glad and rejoice. And, in fact, there is not a more miserable condition than that of unbelievers, when by their brutish insensibility they trample under foot the Divine benefits which they greedily devour; for the more abundantly God pampers them, the fouler is their ingratitude. True happiness then consists in our apprehending the Divine goodness which, filling our hearts with joy, may stir us up to praise and thanksgiving.

The prophet afterwards proves from the effect, that those who with joy and delight acknowledge God to be their father are blessed, because they not only enjoy his benefits, but also, confiding in his favor, pass the whole course of their life in mental peace and tranquillity. This is the import of *walking in the light of God's countenance*: it is to repose upon his providence from the certain persuasion that he has a special care about our well-being, and keeps watch and ward effectually to secure it. The expressions *rejoicing in his name*, and *glorying in his righteousness*, are to the same purpose. The idea involved in them is, that believers find in God abundant, yea more than abundant, ground to rejoice and glory. The word *daily* appears to denote steadfast and unwavering perseverance; and thus there is indirectly censured the foolish arrogance of those who, inflated only with wind and presuming on their own strength, lift up their horns on high. Standing as they do upon an insecure foundation, they must at length inevitably fall. Whence it follows, that there is no true magnanimity nor any power which can stand but that which leans upon the grace of God alone; even as we see how Paul (Romans 8:31) nobly boasts, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" and defies all calamities both present and to come.

**17.** *For thou art the glory of their strength.* The same sentiment is confirmed when it is declared, that God never leaves his faithful servants destitute of strength. By the appellation *the glory of their strength*, which is ascribed to him, is meant that they are always so sustained by his present aid as to have just ground to glory in him; or which amounts to the same thing, that his power appears always glorious in aiding and sustaining them. They are, however, at the same time, reminded of the duty of yielding to God all the praise of their being preserved in safety. If this is true as to the present life, it is much more truly applicable to the spiritual life of the soul. Farther, the more highly to magnify this instance of God's liberality, we are taught, at the same time, that it depends entirely upon his good pleasure, there being no other cause of it.<sup>536</sup> Whence it follows, that they are wholly bound and indebted to Him who is induced by his free bounty alone to continue to extend to them his help.

**18.** *For to Jehovah is our buckler.* As the chief protection of the people was in the person of their king, it is here expressly shown, that the maintenance of the welfare of the faithful by his instrumentality is the gift of God. But it is to be noticed, that the prophet's mind was not so fixed upon this temporal and transitory kingdom as to neglect, at the same time, to consider the end of

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<sup>536</sup> "The Hebrew , must be rendered *of or from the Lord*, in both places in this verse: 'Of the Lord is our shield *or* defense;' 'Of the Lord, *or* from him,' *i e.*, of his appointment, 'is our King.'"— *Hammond*

it, as we shall presently see. He knew that it was only on account of Christ that God made his favor to flow upon the head of the Church, and from thence upon the whole body. And, in the first place, while he calls the king metaphorically *a buckler*, — a figurative expression frequently employed in Scripture, — he confesses that when the people are defended by his hand and working, it is nevertheless done by the providence of God, and is thus to be traced to a higher source than human agency. The same thing is again repeated in the second clause, in which it is affirmed, that the king was given by God to govern the people; and that, therefore, the defense which comes from the king is a blessing of God. Moreover, we must remember that what is said of this kingdom, which was a shadow of something greater, properly applies to the person of Christ, whom the Father has given to us to be the guardian of our welfare, that we may be maintained and defended by his power.

### Psalm 89:19-23

**19.** Then thou spakest in vision to thy meek ones,<sup>537</sup> and saidst, I have laid help upon a mighty one; I have exalted one chosen from among the people. **20.** I have found David my servant; with my holy oil [literally with the oil of my holiness] have I anointed him. **21.** Therefore, my hand shall be established with him: my arm also shall strengthen him. **22.** The enemy shall not exact upon him,<sup>538</sup> nor shall the son of iniquity afflict him. **23.** And I will break in pieces his oppressors before his face; and I will strike those who hate him.

**19.** *Then thou spakest in vision to thy meek ones.* The Psalmist now declares at greater length why he said that the king, set over the chosen people for the preservation of the public good, was given them from heaven; namely, because he was not chosen by the suffrages of men, nor usurped at his own hand the supreme power, nor insinuated himself into it by corrupt arts, but was elected by God to be the instrument of maintaining the public good, and performed the duties of his office under the auspices and conduct of God. The design of the prophet, as we shall shortly see more clearly, is to distinguish this Divinely-appointed king from all other kings. Although what Paul teaches in Romans 13:1, is true, “There is no power but of God;” yet there was a great difference between David and all earthly kings who have acquired sovereign power by worldly means. God had delivered the scepter to his servant David immediately with his own hand, so to speak, and had seated him on the royal throne by his own authority. The particle *az*, which properly signifies *then*, is taken also for *long since*, or *in old time*. The meaning, therefore, is, that whereas some are born kings, succeeding their fathers by right of inheritance, and some are elevated to the royal dignity by election, while others acquire it for themselves by violence and force of arms, God was the founder of this kingdom, having chosen David to the throne by his own voice. Farther, although he revealed his purpose to Samuel, yet as the plural number is here used, implying, that the same oracle had been delivered to others, we may certainly conclude that it had been communicated to other prophets that they might be able, with one consent, to bear testimony that David was created

<sup>537</sup> “Sans qu’il y en ait aucune autre cause.” — *Fr.*

<sup>538</sup> The word in the Hebrew Bible for “thy meek ones” is in the singular number; but in the ancient versions, and in sixty-three MSS. of Dr Kennicott’s collection, and seventy-one of De Rossi’s, it is in the plural number.

king by the Divine appointment. And, indeed, as other distinguished and celebrated prophets lived at that time, it is not very probable that a matter of so great importance was concealed from them. But Samuel alone is named in this business, because he was the publisher of the Divine oracle and the minister of the royal anointing. As God in those days spake to his prophets either by dreams or by *visions*, this last mode of revelation is here mentioned.

There next follows the substance or amount of the Divine oracle, That God had furnished with help the strong or mighty one whom he had chosen to be the supreme head and governor of the kingdom. David is called *strong*, not because naturally and in himself he excelled in strength, (for, as is well known, he was of small stature, and despised among his brethren, so that even Samuel passed him over with neglects) but because God, after having chosen him, endued him with new strength, and other distinguished qualities suitable for a king; even as in a parallel case, when Christ chose his apostles, he not only honored them with the title, but at the same time bestowed the gifts which were necessary for executing their office. And at the present day he imparts to his ministers the same grace of his Spirit. The strength of David, then, of which mention is here made, was the effect of his election; for God, in creating him king, furnished him at the same time with strength adequate for the preservation of the people. This appears still more distinctly from the second clause, where this invincible strength is traced to its source: *I have exalted one chosen from among the people*. All the words are emphatic. When God declares that he *exalted* him, it is to intimate the low and mean condition in which David lived, unknown and obscure, before God stretched out his hand to him. To the same effect is the expression which follows, *from among the people*. The meaning is, that he was at that time unnoted, and belonged to the lowest class of the people, and gave no indications of superior excellence, being the least esteemed of his father's children, in whose country cottage he held the humble office of a herdsman.<sup>539</sup> By the word *chosen*, God calls us back to the consideration of his own free will, as if he forbade us to seek for any other cause of David's exaltation than his own good pleasure.

**20** *I have found David my servant*. The prophet confirms the same proposition, That there was nothing of royalty in David, who owed all to the sovereignty of God in preventing him by his grace. Such is the import of the word *found*, as if God had said, When I took him to elevate him, this proceeded entirely from my free goodness. The name *servant*, therefore, does not denote any merit, but is to be referred to the divine call. It is as if God had said, that he confirmed and ratified by his authority the sovereign power of David; and if He approved it, its legitimacy is placed beyond all doubt. The second clause of the verse affords an additional confirmation of God's free election: *With my holy oil have I anointed him*. This anointing, which was not the fruit of David's own policy, but which he obtained contrary to all expectation, was the cause of his elevation to the estate of royalty. God then having of himself, and according to his mere good pleasure, anticipated David, that he might anoint him king by the hand of Samuel, he justly declares that *he found him*. It is afterwards added, that he will be the guardian and protector of this kingdom of which he was the founder; for it is not his usual way to abandon his works after having commenced them, but, on the contrary, to carry them forward by a continued process of improvement to their completion.

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<sup>539</sup> "L'ennemi n'aura puissance sur luy." — Fr. "The enemy shall not have power over him."

**22** *The enemy shall not exact upon him.* <sup>540</sup> Here it is declared in express terms, that although David may not be without enemies, the power of God will be always ready to maintain and defend him, that he may not be oppressed with unrighteous violence. It is accordingly affirmed, that David will not be tributary to his enemies, as he who is vanquished in battle is constrained to grant such conditions of peace as his conqueror may dictate, however injurious to himself these may be. When his enemies are called *sons of iniquity*, it is tacitly intimated, that this government will be so exempt from tyranny and extortion, that whoever shall attempt to overthrow it will be involved in the perpetration of wrong and wickedness. The amount is, that David and his successors will be so secure and strongly fortified by the divine protection, that it will be impossible for their enemies to treat them as they would wish. In regard to the fact, that God suffered this kingdom to be greatly afflicted, so that David's successors were constrained to pay a vast amount of tribute to foreign and heathen kings, it is not at variance with this promise; for, although the power of the kingdom was reduced, it was enough that the root still remained, until Christ came, in whose hand the kingdom was at length firmly established. As both the king and the people wickedly rejected this singular blessing of God, the kingdom was often shaken through their own default, afterwards impaired, and finally ruined. Yet God, to confirm his oracle concerning the perpetuity of this kingdom, ceased not all along to cherish and preserve some hope, by contending against their ingratitude. Besides, when mention is made of David's *haters* and *oppressors*, it is intimated, that this throne will not be privileged with exemption from annoyances and troubles, inasmuch as there will be always some who will rise up in hostility against it, unless God set himself in opposition to them.

### Psalm 89:24-29

**24.** My truth and my mercy shall be with him: and in my name shall his horn be exalted. **25.** And I will set his hand in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers. <sup>541</sup> **26.** He shall cry to me, Thou art my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation. **27.** I will also make him my first-born, <sup>542</sup> higher than the kings of the earth. **28.** And I will keep my mercy for him for ever, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. **29.** And I will establish his seed for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven.

**24** *My truth and my mercy shall be with him.* God shows that he will continue to exercise without intermission that grace which he had manifested towards David at first. These words are as if he had said, that to prove himself faithful to his word, he would be always gracious and bountiful. Thus We see that God, not only at the outset, furnished David with testimonies of his goodness,

<sup>540</sup> "Quum ultimus esset in rustico tugurio, et inter pecuarios." — *Lat.* "Veu qu'il estoit le plus petit en la maison de son pere, et qu'en ce mesnage de village il estoit de ceux qui gardoyent les bestes." — *Fr.*

<sup>541</sup> "The allusion appears to us to be made to a cruel and unjust creditor, who exacts not only his just debts, but some exaggerated demand, with usurious interest, which was not permitted." — *Williams.*

<sup>542</sup> This means, that David's power should extend from the Mediterranean, or Great Sea, to the river Euphrates. Gejerus and Le Clerc have illustrated this passage from a speech addressed to Alexander by the Scythian ambassadors, in Q. Curtius, 50, 7." *Si Dii habitum corporis tui aviditati animi parem esse voluissent, orbis te non caperet; altera manu orientem, altera occidentem contingeres.*" "If the gods had given thee a body proportionable to thy insatiable mind, the world would not be able to contain thee. Thou wouldst stretch forth one hand to the furthest extremities of the east, and the other to the utmost west."

but that he always continued to deal with him in the same merciful way. This has a reference to the whole Church of Christ, so that the divine goodness is manifested in the whole course of our salvation, and not only at our first entrance upon it, as these shufflers and sophists the Sorbonists foolishly talk. <sup>543</sup> *The horn* of David denotes here, as it often does in other places, his glory, dignity, and power. The meaning therefore is, that by the grace of God, this kingdom shall always flourish and prosper.

**25.** *And I will set his hand in the sea.* The vast extent of the kingdom is here adverted to. As the people by their wickedness had, as it were, blocked up the way, and intercepted the blessing of God, their inheritance was more limited than the promise implied. But now God declares, that during the reign of David, it will be again enlarged, so that the people shall possess the whole country, from the sea even to the river Euphrates. From this we gather, that what God had promised by Moses was fulfilled only in the person of David, that is to say, from his time. <sup>544</sup> *By the rivers* may be understood, either the Euphrates alone, which is cut into many channels, or the other neighboring rivers on the coast of Syria.

**26.** *He shall cry to me, Thou art my Father.* In this verse it is declared, that the chief excellence of this king will consist in this, that he will be accounted the Son of God. This indeed is a title of honor, which is applied to all whom God ordains to be kings, as we have seen in a previous psalm,

“I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High:”

(Psalm 82:6)

but in the passage before us, something special is expressed of the holy king whom God had chosen, and it is intended to say, that he will be the son of God in a different sense. We shall immediately see in the subsequent verse, how he is placed in a higher rank than the kings of the earth, although they may sway the scepter over a larger extent of country. It was therefore a privilege peculiar to only one king in this world, to be called the Son of God. Had it been otherwise, the apostle reasoned not only inconclusively but absurdly, in quoting this text as a proof of the doctrine, that Christ is superior to the angels:

“I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son,”

(Hebrews 1:5.)

Angels, and kings, and all who are regenerated by the Spirit of adoption, are called *sons of God*; but David, when God promises to take him for his son, is, by singular prerogative, elevated above all others to whom this designation is applied. This is still more apparent from the following verse, in which he is called *God's first-born*, because he is higher than all the kings of the earth; and this is an honor which transcends all the dignity both of men and angels. If it is objected, that David being a mortal man could not be equal to the angels, the obvious answer is, that if he is considered in himself, he cannot justly be elevated to the same rank with them, but with the highest propriety he may, in so far as for a time he represented the person of Christ.

**28.** *And I will keep my mercy to him for ever.* We see how God frequently repeats, that he had set up the kingdom of David with the express design of establishing it for ever. By placing *his mercy* first in order, and then adding *his covenant*, he points out the cause of this covenant, intimating

<sup>543</sup> “*I will make him my first-born; i.e., as the eldest son of a family ranks the highest, and receives the most from his father, so shall David be first in the order of kings, who, when they are legitimate sovereigns, may be regarded as the sons of God, their common Father: comp. Genesis 27:1, etc.; Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy 21:17; Psalm 2:7; Colossians 1:15. In Isaiah 14:30, by the first-born of the poor, is meant the extreme of that class, they who are the poorest of the poor.*” — *Cresswell*.

<sup>544</sup> “*Sicuti nugantur Sophistae.*” — *Lat.* “*Comme gazouillent ces brouillons et Sophistes de Sorbonistes.*” — *Fr.*

in one word, that it is gratuitous, and that his grace is not only the foundation on which it rests, but also the cause why it is preserved inviolate. The amount is, that God will be always merciful to David, in order that his covenant may never fail. From this it follows, that its inviolability depends upon the mere good pleasure of God. In the next verse, God expresses the effect of his truth, declaring, that the posterity of David will sit for ever on the royal throne. There being nothing under heaven of long continuance, *the days of heaven* is an expression employed to denote everlasting duration. Whence it follows, that this prophecy cannot have its full accomplishment in any till we come to Christ, in whom alone, in the strict and proper sense, this everlasting duration is to be found.

### Psalm 89:30-37

**30.** If his children shall forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; **31.** If they violate<sup>545</sup> my ordinances, and keep not my statutes; **32.** Then will I visit their transgression with my rod,<sup>546</sup> and their iniquity with stripes. **33.** But my loving-kindness will I not withdraw from him; nor suffer my faithfulness to fail, [literally, nor will I lie in my truth.] **34.** My covenant will I not break, nor alter that which hath proceeded from my lips. **35.** Once have I sworn by my holiness, That I will not lie<sup>547</sup> to David. **36.** His seed shall endure for ever; and his throne as the sun before me. **37.** It shall be established for ever as the moon, and a faithful witness in the heaven.<sup>548</sup> Selah.

**30.** *If his children shall forsake my law.* The prophet proceeds yet farther, declaring, that although the posterity of David should fall into sin, yet God had promised to show himself merciful towards them, and that he would not punish their transgressions to the full extent of their desert. Moreover, to give the promise the greater efficacy, he always introduces God speaking, as if he presented to him a request corresponding with the precise words and express articles of his covenant.<sup>549</sup> It was very necessary that this should be added; for so easily do we slide into evil, and so prone are we to continual falls, that unless God, in the exercise of his infinite mercy, pardoned us, there would not be a single article of his covenant which would continue steadfast. God, therefore, seeing that it could not be otherwise, but that the posterity of David, in so far as it depended upon themselves, would frequently fall from the covenant, by their own fault, has provided a remedy for such cases, in his pardoning grace.

Farther, as it is profitable for men to be subjected to divine correction, he does not promise that he will allow them to escape unpunished, which would be to encourage them in their sins; but he promises, that in his chastisements he will exercise a fatherly moderation, and will not execute

<sup>545</sup> "C'est a dire, de son temps."

<sup>546</sup> The original word for "they violate" is *yechallelu*, from *chalal*, *he perforated* or *pierced through* "When said of sacred things, *he profaned, violated, polluted, prostituted*, as though, *pierced through* divine things." — *Bythner*

<sup>547</sup> "In virga." — *Lat.* "Avec ma verge." — *Fr.*

<sup>548</sup> Heb. 'if I lie,' the most solemn form of negative in that language." — *Williams.*

<sup>549</sup> "The whole passage, beginning with 'I have laid help,' in verse 19, to the end of verse 37, may be considered as a paraphrase of what God had said unto David, (2 Samuel 7:8, etc.,) through the mouth of Nathan. The promises herein recited, we know from history, had their fulfillment only in Jesus Christ. The Psalmist, therefore, in the next subsequent verses, contemplating the calamities of his nation, indulges in the language of complaint." — *Cresswell.*

vengeance upon them to the full extent which their sins deserve. It is also to be observed, that he promises pardon, not only for light offenses, but also for great and aggravated sins. It is not without cause that he uses these forms of expression, *to forsake his law, to violate his statutes, not to walk in his judgments, and not to keep his commandments* Nor is it without cause that he uses the word *transgression*, or perfidiousness, and *iniquity*. We see, then, that the patience and lenity of God, by which he reconciles to himself the posterity of David, is extended even to sins of the most heinous and aggravated description.

This passage teaches us, that when God adopts men into his family, they do not forthwith completely lay aside the flesh with its corruptions, as is held by some enthusiasts, who dream, that as soon as we are grafted into the body of Christ, all the corruption that is in us must be destroyed. Would to God that we could all on a sudden change our nature, and thus exhibit that angelic perfection which they require! But as it is quite apparent, that we are far from such an attainment, so long as we carry about with us this tabernacle of flesh, let us bid adieu to that devilish figment, and let us all betake ourselves to the sanctuary of forgiveness, which is at all times open for us. God, unquestionably, is speaking of the household of his Church; and yet it is declared, with sufficient plainness, in the promise which he makes of pardoning their offenses, that they will transgress and be guilty of revolting from him.

To limit what is here said to the ancient people of Israel, is an exposition not only absurd, but altogether impious. In the first place, I take it as a settled point, which we have already had occasion often to consider, that this kingdom was erected to be a figure or shadow in which God might represent the Mediator to his Church: and this can be proved, not only from the testimony of Christ and the apostles, but it may also be clearly and indubitably deduced from the thing considered in itself. If we set Christ aside, where will we find that everlasting duration of the royal throne of which mention is here made? The second from David, in the order of succession, was despoiled of the greater part of the kingdom, so that out of twelve tribes he retained scarcely one tribe and a half. Afterwards, how many losses did this kingdom thus greatly reduced sustain, and by how many calamities was it defaced, until at length the king and the whole body of the people were dragged into captivity, with the utmost ignominy and reproach? And I pray you to consider where was the dignity of the throne, when the king, after his sons were put to death before his eyes, was himself treated as a criminal? (2 Kings 25:7.) The Jews were indeed afterwards permitted to dwell in their own country; but it was without the honor and title of a kingdom. Accordingly, Ezekiel (Ezekiel 21:27) declares thrice, that the crown shall be laid in the dust, “until he come whose right it is.” The obvious conclusion then is, that perpetuity, as applied to this kingdom, can be verified in Christ alone. And, in fact, what access could the Jews of old time have had to God, or what access could we in the present day have to him, did not the Mediator come between us and him, to cause us find favor in his sight?

It now remains that we apply to ourselves the qualities of this kingdom of which we have been speaking. As its everlasting duration leads us to the hope of a blessed immortality, and its invincible strength inspires our minds with tranquillity, and prevents our faith from failing, notwithstanding all the efforts which Satan may put forth against us, and notwithstanding the numerous forms of death which may surround us; so the pardon which is here promised belongs to the spiritual kingdom of Christ: and it may be equally gathered from this passage, that the salvation of the Church depends solely upon the grace of God, and the truth of his promises. If it is objected, that those who are regenerated by the Spirit of God never totally fall away, because the incorruptible seed of the word

abides in them, I grant that this is an important truth. It is not, however, a total apostasy which is here spoken of — not such as implies the entire extinction of godliness in the individual chargeable with it. But it sometimes happens that the faithful cast off the yoke of God, and break forth into sin in such a manner, as that the fear of God seems to be extinguished in them; and such being the case, it was necessary that He should promise the pardon even of heinous sins, that they might not upon every fall be overwhelmed with despair. Thus David seemed, to outward appearance, to be wholly deprived of the Spirit of God, whom he prays to be restored to him. The reason why God leaves hope of pardon even for detestable and deadly transgressions is, that the enormity of our sins may not keep us back or hinder us from seeking reconciliation with him. From this, we are led to condemn the undue severity of the fathers, who scrupled to receive to repentance those who had fallen for the second or third time. Due care must indeed be taken lest, by too great forbearance, loose reins should be given to men to commit iniquity; but there is no less danger in an extreme degree of rigour. It is to be observed, that when God declares that he will show himself merciful towards sinners, who have violated his law, and broken his commandments, he purposely employs these odious terms to excite our hatred and detestation of sin, and not to entice us to the commission of it. Still, however, we must understand the passage as amounting to this, That although the faithful may not in every instance act in a manner worthy of the grace of God, and may therefore deserve to be rejected by him, yet he will be merciful to them, because remission of sins is an essential article promised in his covenant. And, indeed, as God in his law requires us to perform what exceeds our power, all that he promises in it is of no avail to us, to whom it can never be accomplished. Hence Paul, in Romans 4:14, affirms, “If the inheritance come by the law, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect.” To this also belong these words of Jeremiah,

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord;) but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

Farther, since God does not adopt us as his children, to encourage us to take liberty to commit sin with the greater boldness, mention is here made at the same time of chastisement, by which he shows that he hates the sins of his children, and, warning them of what they have deserved in offending him, invites and exhorts them to repentance. This fatherly chastisement then, which operates as medicine, holds the medium between undue indulgence, which is an encouragement to sin, and extreme severity, which precipitates persons into destruction. Here the inspired writer adverts to the prophecy recorded in 2 Samuel 7:14, where God declares that in chastising his own people, he will proceed after the manner of men —

“If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men.” (2 Samuel 7:14)

God there speaks of his chastising his people after the manner of men, either because the anger of a father in correcting his children proceeds from love, — for he sees that otherwise he would fail in promoting their good; or it contains a contrast between God and men, implying, that in the task of chastising he will proceed with moderation and gentleness; for, were he to put forth his strength, he would immediately bring us to nothing, yea, he could do this simply by moving one



of his fingers. The scope of both passages undoubtedly is, that whenever God punishes the sins of true believers, he will observe a wholesome moderation; and it is therefore our duty to take all the punishments which he inflicts upon us, as so many medicines. On this point, the Papists have egregiously blundered. Not understanding the true end and fruit of chastisements, they have imagined that God proceeds herein as if avenging himself upon sinners. Whence arose their satisfactions, and from these again proceeded pardons and indulgences, by which they endeavored to redeem themselves from the hand and vengeance of God.<sup>550</sup> But God has nothing else in view than to correct the vices of his children, in order that, after having thoroughly purged them, he may restore them anew to his favor and friendship; according to the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:33, which affirm that the faithful “are chastened of the Lord, that they should not be condemned with the world.” For this reason, lest they should be overwhelmed with the weight of chastisement, he restrains his hand, and makes considerate allowance for their infirmity. Thus the promise is fulfilled, That *he does not withdraw his loving-kindness from his people*, even when he is angry with them; for, while he is correcting them for their profit and salvation, he does not cease to love them. It is, however, to be observed, that there is a change of person in the words. After it is said, *If his children shall forsake my law*, etc., it is at length subjoined, *My loving-kindness or mercy will I not withdraw from Him*. It ought surely to have been said, *them* instead of *him*, since it is *children* in the plural number who are before spoken of. But it is very probable that this form of expression is purposely employed to teach us that we are reconciled to God only through Christ; and that if we would expect to find mercy, we must seek for it from that source alone. What follows in the end of the verse, *I will not suffer my faithfulness to fail*, is more emphatic than if it had been said that God will be true to what he has said. It is possible that God’s promise may fail of taking effect, and yet he may continue faithful. For example, the law is true and holy, and yet of what advantage is it to us that salvation is promised in the law, when no human being can ever obtain salvation by it? God then in this passage leads us farther; promising that his covenant shall be steadfast and effectual, not only because he will be faithful on his part, but also because he will keep his people from falling away through their own inconstancy.

**34** *My covenant will I not break*. As the true knowledge of God’s mercy can only be obtained from his word, he enjoins us to keep our eyes intently fixed upon his covenant. The more excellent and invaluable a blessing it is, “Never to be rejected after having been once adopted by him,” the more difficult it is for us to believe its truth. And we know how many thoughts from time to time present themselves to our minds, tempting us to call it in question. That the faithful, therefore, may not harass themselves beyond measure in debating in their own minds whether or no they are in favor with God, they are enjoined to look to the covenant, and to embrace the salvation which is offered to them in it. God here commends to us his own faithfulness, that we may account his promise sufficient, and that we may not seek the certainty of our salvation any where else. He had said above, *If the children of David break my statutes*; and now, alluding to that breach, he declares that he will not requite them as they requite him, *My covenant will I not break*, implying, that although his people may not altogether act in a manner corresponding to their vocation, as they ought to do, he will not suffer his covenant to be broken and disannulled on account of their fault, because he will promptly and effectually prevent this in the way of blotting out their sins by a

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<sup>550</sup> “Acsi ex conceptis pacti verbis cum eo ageret.” — *Lat.* “Comme s’il luy presentoit requeste suyvant les propres mots et articles expres de son alliance.” — *Fr.*

gratuitous pardon. He is still pursuing the illustration of the preceding proposition, *I will not suffer my faithfulness to fail*; promising not only to be faithful on his side, as we say, but also that what he has promised shall take full effect, in despite of all the impediments which men may cast in the way; for he will strive against their sins, that by means of them the fruit of his goodness may not be prevented from reaching them. When the Jews, by their ingratitude and treachery, revolted from him, the covenant was not disannulled, because it was founded upon the perfect immutability of his nature. And still, at the present day, when our sins mount even to the heavens, the goodness of God fails not to rise above them, since it is far above the heavens.

**35.** *Once have I sworn by my holiness.* God now confirms by an oath what he previously stated he had promised to David; from which it appears that it was not a matter of small importance; it being certain that God would not interpose his holy name in reference to what was of no consequence. It is a token of singular loving-kindness for him, upon seeing us prone to distrust, to provide a remedy for it so compassionately. We have, therefore, so much the less excuse if we do not embrace, with true and unwavering faith, his promise which is so strongly ratified, since in his deep interest about our salvation, he does not withhold his oath, that we may yield entire credence to his word. If we do not reckon his simple promise sufficient, he adds his oath, as it were, for a pledge. The adverb *once*,<sup>551</sup> denotes that the oath is irrevocable, and that therefore we have not the least reason to be apprehensive of any inconstancy. He affirms that he sware *by his holiness*, because a greater than himself is not to be found, by whom he could swear. In swearing by Him, we constitute him our judge, and place him as sovereign over us, even as he is our sovereign by nature. It is a more emphatic manner of expression for him to say, *by my holiness*, than if he had said, *by myself*, not only because it magnifies and exalts his glory, but also because it is far more fitted for the confirmation of faith, calling back, as it does, the faithful to the earthly habitation which he had chosen for himself, that they might not think it necessary for them to seek him at a distance; for by the term *holiness*, I have no doubt, he means *the sanctuary*. And yet he swears by himself, and by nothing else; for, in naming the temple which he had appointed as his seat, he does not depart from himself; but, merely accommodating his language to our rude understandings, swears by his holiness which dwells visibly upon earth. With respect to the elliptical form of the oath, we have seen, in a previous psalm, that this was a manner of swearing quite common among the Hebrews. Thus they were warned that the name of God was not to be used without due consideration, lest, by using it rashly and irreverently, they should draw down upon themselves the Divine vengeance. The abrupt and suspended form of expression was, as it were, a bridle to restrain them, and give them opportunity for reflection. It is no uncommon thing for God to borrow something from the common custom of men.

**36.** *His seed shall endure for ever.* There now follows the promise that the right of sovereignty shall always remain with the posterity of David. These two things — his offspring and his throne, are conjoined; and by these words the everlasting duration of the kingdom is promised, so that it should never pass to those who were of a strange and different race. The sun and the moon are produced as witnesses; for although they are creatures subject to corruption, they yet possess more stability than the earth or air; the elements, as we see, being subject to continual changes. As the whole of this lower world is subject to unceasing agitation and change, there is presented to us a more steadfast state of things in the sun and moon, that the kingdom of David might not be estimated

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<sup>551</sup> “Par lesquels moyens ils ont pensé se racheter pour échapper la main et vengeance de Dieu.” — *Fr.*

according to the common order of nature. Since, however, this royal throne was shaken in the time of Rehoboam, as we have before had occasion to remark, and afterwards broken down and overthrown, it follows that this prophecy cannot be limited to David. For although at length the outward majesty of this kingdom was put an end to without hope of being re-established, the sun ceased not to shine by day, nor the moon by night. Accordingly, until we come to Christ, God might seem to be unfaithful to his promises. But in the branch which sprung from the root of Jesse, these words were fulfilled in their fullest sense.<sup>552</sup>

### Psalm 89:38-45

**38.** But thou hast abhorred and rejected him; thou hast been angry against thy anointed. **39.** Thou hast made the covenant of thy servant to cease;<sup>553</sup> thou hast profaned his crown to the earth. **40.** Thou hast broken down all his walls; thou hast made his fortresses a ruin. **41.** All who pass by the way have spoiled him: he has been a reproach to his neighbors. **42.** Thou hast exalted the right hand of his oppressors; thou hast caused all his enemies to rejoice. **43.** Thou hast also blunted the edge of his sword, and hast not made him to stand in battle. **44.** Thou hast effaced his splendor, and cast his throne to the ground. **45.** Thou hast shortened the days of his youth; thou hast covered him with shame. Selah.

**38.** *But thou hast abhorred and rejected him.* Here the prophet complains that in consequence of the decayed state of the kingdom, the prophecy appeared to have failed of its accomplishment. Not that he accuses God of falsehood; but he speaks in this manner, that he may with all freedom cast his cares and griefs into the bosom of God, who permits us to deal thus familiarly with him. It doubtless becomes us to frame our desires according to the divine will; but that person cannot be said to pass beyond due bounds who humbly laments that he is deprived of the tokens of the divine favor, provided he does not despair, or rebelliously murmur against God; and we shall afterwards see that the prophet, when he blesses God at the close of the psalm, affords a proof of tranquil submission, by which he corrects or qualifies his complaints. Whoever, therefore, that Rabbin was who maintained that it is unlawful to recite this psalm, he was led by a foolish and impious peevishness to condemn what God bears with in his children. In taking this liberty of expostulating with God, the prophet had no other object in view than that he might the more effectually resist distrust and impatience, by unburdening himself in the divine presence. Farther,

<sup>552</sup> “*Once.* Emphatic. It needs not to be repeated: nor will be.” — *Walford.*

<sup>553</sup> “There is a very obvious and important observation to be made on the description of the apparent change that had taken place in the conduct of God towards the family and descendants of David. The extraordinary promises which had been given to that prince were certainly not accomplished in the fortunes of his descendants, the kings of Judah; nor shall we be able to discover how the truth of these promises is to be sustained without an admission of their being given in reference to the Messiah, that spiritual king, who ‘was born of the seed of David, according to the flesh.’ When we take the assurances which were made to David, and which pledged to him the perpetuity of his kingdom, in this sense, the mystery is disclosed, and the difficulty is completely removed: ‘the loving-kindness of God has not been withdrawn from him, nor has his faithfulness failed.’ David has still a royal successor, though the genealogy of his posterity is lost upon earth; a successor who will endure for ever, and whose throne will be perpetuated in glory, not merely as long as the sun and the moon continue, but will still be rising in splendor, when those lights of heaven shall be extinguished, and the new heaven and the new earth shall witness the imperishable glories of the Son of God.” — *Walford.*

the words, *Thou hast abhorred and rejected him*, if criticised according to the rules of the Greek and Latin language, will be pronounced inelegant; for the word which is most emphatic is put first, and then there is added another which is less emphatic. But as the Hebrews do not observe our manner of arrangement in this respect, the order here adopted is quite consistent with the idiom of the Hebrew language. The third verb contains the reason of this change on the part of God, teaching us that the king was rejected because God was incensed against him. It is thought by some that there is here a recital of the mockery in which the enemies of the chosen people indulged, an opinion which they adopt to avoid the difficulty arising from viewing this severe kind of complaint, as uttered by the Church, which proved such a stumbling-block to the Rabbin above referred to, that on account of it he condemned the whole psalm. But it is to be observed, that the prophet speaks according to the common feeling and apprehension of men; while at the same time he was fully convinced in his own mind, that the king who had been once chosen by God could not be rejected by him.

In the same sense we ought to understand what follows (verse 39) concerning the disannulling of the covenant — *Thou hast made the covenant of thy servant to cease*. The prophet does not charge God with levity and inconstancy: he only complains that those notable promises of which he had spoken had to appearance vanished and come to nought. Whenever the faithful put the question,

“How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord?” “Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord?”  
(Psalm 13:1; 44:23; 79:5.)

they assuredly are not to be understood as attributing forgetfulness or sleep to him: they only lay before him the temptations which flesh and blood suggest to them in order to induce him speedily to succor them under the infirmity with which they are distressed. It is not then wonderful, though the prophet, amidst such horrible desolation, was affected by the infirmities to which human nature is so liable in such circumstances, and thus prompted to make the assertion, that what God promised was far from being manifestly realised. When he saw all things going contrary to the Divine promise, he was not a man so steel-hearted as to remain unmoved at so pitiable and confused a spectacle. But coming freely into the Divine presence, he seeks a remedy that he might not be swallowed up with sorrow, which would have been the case had he indulged in secret repining, and neglected this means of alleviation. What is added in the close of the verse, *Thou hast cast his crown to the earth*, does not seem to apply to the time of Rehoboam, unless, perhaps, the dismemberment of the kingdom may be denoted by the casting of the crown to the earth. The statements which are made immediately after must necessarily be referred to some greater calamity. If this is admitted, the author of the psalm must have been a different person from Ethan, who was one of the four wise men, of whom mention is made in the sacred history, (2 Kings 4:31.) In so doubtful a case, I leave every one to adopt the conjecture which appears to him the most probable.

**40.** *Thou hast broken down all his walls*. The prophet, although he might easily have found another cause to which to impute the breaking down and razing of the fortifications, yet under the influence of devout and sanctified feeling acknowledges God to be the author of this calamity; being fully convinced that men could not at their pleasure have destroyed the kingdom which God had set up had not the Divine anger been kindled. Afterwards speaking metaphorically, he complains that the kingdom was exposed as a prey to all passers-by, resembling a field or garden, of which the walls were broken down, and the ground laid open to depredation. As an aggravation of a calamity which in itself was sufficiently grievous, the additional indignity is brought forward, that

the king *was a reproach to his neighbors*. The worldly and the profane, there can be no doubt, finding an opportunity so much according to their wishes, derided him, saying, Is this that king of God's choice, a king more excellent than the angels, and whose throne was to continue as long as the sun and the moon should endure? As these railings recoiled upon God himself, the prophet justly complains of the reproachful derision with which God's Anointed was treated, whose dignity and royal estate were ratified and confirmed by heavenly anointing.

**42** *Thou hast exalted the right hand of his oppressors*. Here he states that God took part with the enemies of the king; for he was well aware that these enemies could not have prevailed but by the will of God, who inspires some with courage, and renders others faint-hearted. In short, in proportion to the number of the calamities which had befallen the chosen people, was the number of the evidences of their having been forsaken by God; for, so long as he continued his favor, the whole world, by all their machinations, were unable to impair the stability of that kingdom. Had it been said that the enemies of the king obtained the victory, the statement would have been quite true; but it would not have been a mode of expression so obviously fitted to exalt the Divine power; as it might have been thought that men setting themselves in opposition to God had, by their own power, forced their way, and effected their purpose, even against those who enjoyed his protection. Accordingly, the prophet reflects with himself, that unless the Divine anger had been incensed, that kingdom which God had erected could not have been reduced to a condition so extremely wretched.

**45**. *Thou hast shortened the days of his youth*. Some would explain this sentence as meaning, that God had weakened the king, so that he faded or withered away at his very entrance upon the flower of youth, and was exhausted with old age before reaching the period of manhood.<sup>554</sup> This exposition may be regarded as not improbable; but still it is to be observed, in order to our having a clearer understanding of the mind of the prophet, that he does not speak exclusively of any one individual, but compares the state of the kingdom to the life of man. His complaint then amounts to this, That God caused the kingdom to wax old, and finally to decay, before it reached a state of complete maturity; its fate resembling that of a young man, who, while yet increasing in strength and vigor, is carried away by a violent death before his time. This similitude is highly appropriate; for the kingdom, if we compare the state of it at that period with the Divine promise, had scarce yet fully unfolded its blossom, when, amidst its first advances, suddenly smitten with a grievous decay, its freshness and beauty were defaced, while at length it vanished away. Moreover, what we have previously stated must be borne in mind, that when the prophet complains that the issue does not correspond with the promise, or is not such as the promise led the chosen people to expect, he does not, on that account, charge God with falsehood, but brings forward this apparent discrepancy for another purpose — to encourage himself, from the consideration of the Divine promises, to come to the throne of grace with the greater confidence and boldness; and, while he urged this difficulty before God, he was fully persuaded that it was impossible for Him not to show himself faithful to his word. As the majority of men drink up their sorrow and keep it to themselves, because they despair of deriving any benefit from prayer so true believers, the more frankly and familiarly they appeal to God in reference to his promises, the more valiantly do they wrestle against their distrust, and encourage themselves in the hope of a favorable issue.

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<sup>554</sup> “Ou, as quitte l’alliance de ton serviteur.” — *Fr. marg.* “Or, thou hast quitted the covenant of thy servant.”

## Psalm 89:46-48

**46.** How long, O Jehovah? wilt thou hide thyself for ever? shall thy fury burn like fire? **47.** Remember of what age I am! <sup>555</sup> why shouldst thou have created all the sons of men in vain? <sup>556</sup>  
**48.** What man shall live, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul [or life] from the hand of the grave? <sup>557</sup> Selah.

**46.** *How long, O Jehovah? wilt thou hide thyself for ever?* After having poured forth his complaints respecting the sad and calamitous condition of the Church, the Psalmist now turns himself to prayer. Whence it follows that the language of lamentation to which he had hitherto given utterance, although it emanated from carnal sense, was nevertheless conjoined with faith. Unbelievers, in the agitation of trouble, may sometimes engage in prayer, yet whatever they ask proceeds from feigned lips. But the prophet, by connecting prayer with his complaints, bears testimony that he had never lost his confidence in the truth of the Divine promises. With respect to this manner of expression, *How long, for ever?* we have spoken on Psalm 79:5, where we have shown that it denotes a long and continued succession of calamities. Moreover, by asking *How long God will hide himself*, he tacitly intimates that all will be well as soon as God is pleased to look upon his chosen people with a benignant countenance. In the second clause of the verse, he again mentions as the reason why God did not vouchsafe to look upon them with paternal favor, that his anger was incensed against them. The obvious conclusion from which is, that all the afflictions endured by us proceed from our sins; these being the scourges of an offended God.

**47** *Remember how short my time is.* After having confessed that the severe and deplorable afflictions which had befallen the Church were to be traced to her own sins as the procuring cause, the prophet, the more effectually to move God to commiseration, lays before him the brevity of human life, in which, if we receive no taste of the Divine goodness, it will seem that we have been created in vain. That we may understand the passage the more clearly, it will be better to begin with the consideration of the last member of the verse, *Why shouldst thou have created all the sons of men in vain?* The faithful, in putting this question, proceed upon an established first principle, That God has created men and placed them in the world, to show himself a father to them. And, indeed, as his goodness extends itself even to the cattle and lower animals of every kind, <sup>558</sup> it cannot

<sup>555</sup> Some of the Jewish interpreters take this view, and suppose the allusion to be to king Jehoiachin, (2 Kings 24:8.) Kennicott infers from the expression, "Thou hast shortened the days of his youth," that this portion of the psalm refers to Ahaz, who died at thirty-six years of age.

<sup>556</sup> "'Remember at what an age *or* time of life I am.' Or, 'of what duration,' or, 'how fleeting,' (by a transposition of letters from *ce*, *he* *ceased*.) denotes the present time rapidly passing away. Or, the short race of our life; or this world, 'the fashion of which passeth away,' (1 Corinthians 7:31.)" — *Bythner*

<sup>557</sup> Ainsworth reads, "O call thou to remembrance how transitory I am; into what vain state thou hast made all the sons of Adam."

<sup>558</sup> This appeal respecting the universality of death, and the impossibility of avoiding it, meets with a ready response in the bosom of every child of Adam, however exalted or humble his lot. And, when death has once seized on its victim, all the wealth, power, and skill of the world cannot spoil the grave of its dominion. The admirable lines of Gray, in his celebrated Elegy, furnish a very good comment on this verse: —

*"The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,  
 And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,  
 Await alike th' inevitable hour: —  
 The paths of glory lead but to the grave.*

for a moment be supposed, that we, who hold a higher rank in the scale of being than the brute creation, should be wholly deprived of it. Upon the contrary supposition, it were better for us that we had never been born, than to languish away in continual sorrow. There is, moreover, set forth the brevity of the course of our life; which is so brief, that unless God make timely haste in giving us some taste of his benefits, the opportunity for doing this will be lost, since our life passes rapidly away. The drift of this verse is now very obvious. In the first place, it is laid down as a principle, That the end for which men were created was, that they should enjoy God's bounty in the present world; and from this it is concluded that they are born in vain, unless he show himself a father towards them. In the second place, as the course of this life is short, it is argued that if God does not make haste to bless them, the opportunity will no longer be afforded when their life shall have run out.

But here it may be said, in the first place, that the saints take too much upon them in prescribing to God a time in which to work; and, in the next place, that although he afflict us with continual distresses, so long as we are in our state of earthly pilgrimage, yet there is no ground to conclude from this that we have been created in vain, since there is reserved for us a better life in heaven, to the hope of which we have been adopted; and that, therefore, it is not surprising though now our life is hidden from us on earth. I answer, That it is by the permission of God that the saints take this liberty of urging him in their prayers to make haste; and that there is no impropriety in doing so, provided they, at the same time, keep themselves within the bounds of modesty, and, restraining the impetuosity of their affections, yield themselves wholly to his will. With respect to the second point, I grant that it is quite true, that although we must continue to drag out our life amidst continual distresses, we have abundant consolation to aid us in bearing all our afflictions, provided we lift up our minds to heaven. But still it is to be observed, in the first place, that it is certain, considering our great weakness, that no man will ever do this unless he has first tasted of the Divine goodness in this life; and, secondly, that the complaints of the people of God ought not to be judged of according to a perfect rule, because they proceed not from a settled and an undisturbed state of mind, but have always some excess arising from the impetuosity or vehemence of the affections at work in their minds. I at once allow that the man who measures the love of God from the state of things as presently existing, judges by a standard which must lead to a false conclusion;

“for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth,” (Hebrews 12:6.)

But as God is never so severe towards his own people as not to furnish them with actual experimental evidence of his grace, it stands always true that life is profitless to men, if they do not feel, while they live, that He is their father.

As to the second clause of the verse, it has been stated elsewhere that our prayers do not flow in one uniform course, but sometimes betray an excess of sorrow. It is, therefore, not to be wondered at that the faithful, when immoderate sorrow or fear occupies their thoughts and keeps fast hold of them, experience such inattention stealing by degrees upon them, as to make them for a time forget to keep their minds fixed in meditation upon the life to come. Many think it very unaccountable, if the children of God do not, the first moment they begin to think, immediately penetrate into

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*“Can storied urn, or animated bust,  
Back to its mansions call the fleeting breath?  
Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,  
Or Flatt'ry soothe the dull cold ear of Death?”*

heaven, as if thick mists did not often intervene to impede or hinder us when we would look attentively into it. For faith to lose its liveliness is one thing, and for it to be utterly extinguished is another. And, doubtless, whoever is exercised in the judgments of God, and in conflict with temptations, will acknowledge that he is not so mindful of the spiritual life as he ought to be. Although then the question, *Why shouldst thou have created all the sons of men in vain?* is deduced from a true principle, yet it savours somewhat of a faulty excess. Whence it appears that even in our best framed prayers, we have always need of pardon. There always escapes from us some language or sentiment chargeable with excess, and therefore it is necessary for God to overlook or bear with our infirmity.

**48.** *What man shall live, and shall not see death?* This verse contains a confirmation of what has been already stated concerning the brevity of human life. The amount is, that unless God speedily hasten to show himself a father to men, the opportunity of causing them to experience his grace will no longer exist. The original word , *geber*, which we have translated *man*, is derived from the verb , *gabar*, *he was strong*, or *he prevailed*; and the sacred writer employs this word, the more forcibly to express the truth, that no man is privileged with exemption from the dominion of death.

### Psalm 89:49-52

**49.** O Lord! where are thy former mercies? thou hast sworn to David in thy truth. **50.** O Lord! Remember the reproach of thy servants: I have sustained in my bosom all the reproaches of mighty peoples; **51.** With which thy enemies, O Jehovah! have reproached thee; with which they have reproached the footsteps of thy Messiah, [or thy Anointed.] **52.** Blessed be Jehovah for ever! Amen, and Amen.

**49.** *O Lord! where are thy former mercies?* The prophet encourages himself, by calling to remembrance God's former benefits, as if his reasoning were, That God can never be unlike himself, and that therefore the goodness which he manifested in old time to the fathers cannot come to an end. This comparison might indeed make the godly despond, when they find that they are not dealt with by him so gently as he dealt with the fathers, did not another consideration at the same time present itself to their minds — the consideration that he never changes, and never wearies in the course of his beneficence. As to the second clause of the verse, some interpreters connect it with the first, by interposing the relative, thus: — *Where are thy former mercies which thou hast sworn?* In this I readily acquiesce; for the sense is almost the same, although the relative be omitted. God had given evident and indubitable proofs of the truth of the oracle delivered to Samuel; <sup>559</sup> and, therefore, the faithful lay before him both his promise and the many happy fruits of it which had been experienced. They say, *in truth*, that they may with the greater confidence apply to themselves, whatever tokens of his liberality God had in old time bestowed upon the fathers; for they had the same ground to expect the exercise of the Divine goodness towards them as the fathers had, God,

<sup>559</sup> “Sur les asnes et chevaux, et autres bestes brutes.” — *Fr.* “To asses and horses, and other brute beasts.”



who is unchangeably the same, having sworn to be merciful to the posterity of David throughout all ages.

**50.** *O Lord! remember the reproach of thy servants.* They again allege, that they are held in derision by the ungodly, — a consideration which had no small influence in moving God to compassion: for the more grievous and troublesome a temptation it is, to have the wicked deriding our patience, that, after having made us believe that God is not true in what he has promised, they may precipitate us into despair; the more ready is he to aid us, that our feeble minds may not yield to the temptation. The prophet does not simply mean that the reproaches of his enemies are to him intolerable, but that God must repress their insolence in deriding the faith and patience of the godly, in order that those who trust in him may not be put to shame. He enhances still more the same sentiment in the second clause, telling us, that he was assailed with all kind of reproaches by *many peoples*, or by *the great peoples*, for the Hebrew word *rabbim*, signifies both *great* and *many*.

Moreover, it is not without cause, that, after having spoken in general of the servants of God, he changes the plural into the singular number. He does this, that each of the faithful in particular may be the more earnestly stirred up to the duty of prayer. The expression, *in my bosom*, is very emphatic. It is as if he had said, The wicked do not throw from a distance their insulting words, but they vomit them, so to speak, upon the children of God, who are thus constrained to receive them into their bosom, and to bear patiently this base treatment. Such is the perversity of the time in which we live, that we have need to apply the same doctrine to ourselves; for the earth is full of profane and proud despisers of God, who cease not to make themselves merry at our expense. And as Satan is a master well qualified to teach them this kind of rhetoric, the calamities of the Church always furnish them with matter for exercising it. Some take *bosom* for the secret affection of the heart; but this exposition seems to be too refined.

**51.** *With which thy enemies, O Jehovah! have reproached thee.* What the Psalmist now affirms is, not that the wicked torment the saints with their contumelious language, but that they revile even God himself. And he makes this statement, because it is a much more powerful plea for obtaining favor in the sight of God, to beseech him to maintain his own cause, because all the reproaches by which the simplicity of our faith is held up to scorn recoil upon himself, than to beseech him to do this, because he is wounded in the person of his Church; according as he declares in Isaiah,

“Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed; and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel.” (Isaiah 37:23)

That wicked robber Rabshakeh thought that he scoffed only at the wretched Jews whom he besieged, and whose surrender of themselves into his hands he believed he would soon witness; but God took it as if he himself had been the object whom that wicked man directly assailed. On this account also, the prophet calls these enemies of his people *the enemies of God*; namely, because in persecuting the Church with deadly hostility, they made an assault upon the majesty of God, under whose protection the Church was placed.

In the second clause, by *the footsteps of Messiah* or *Christ* is meant the coming of Christ, even as it is said in Isaiah 52:7,

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace!” (Isaiah 52:7)

The Hebrew word *akeb*, sometimes signifies *the heel*; but here, as in many other passages, it signifies *the sole of the foot*. Others translate it *the pace* or *step*, but this gives exactly the same sense. There can be no doubt, that *footsteps*, by the figure synecdoche, is employed to denote *the*

*feet*; and again, that by *the feet*, according to the figure metonymy, is meant the coming of Christ. The wicked, observing that the Jews clung to the hope of redemption, and patiently endured all adversities because a deliverer had been promised them, disdainfully derided their patience, as if all that the prophets had testified concerning the coming of Christ had been only a fable.<sup>560</sup> And now also, although he has been once manifested to the world, yet as, in consequence of his having been received up into the glory of heaven, he seems to be far distant from us, and to have forsaken his Church, these filthy dogs scoff at our hope, as if it were a mere delusion.

**52.** *Blessed be Jehovah for ever!* I am surprised why some interpreters should imagine, that this verse was added by some transcriber in copying the book, affirming, that it does not correspond with the context: as if the language of praise and thanksgiving to God were not as suitable at the close of a psalm as at the opening of it. I have therefore no doubt, that the prophet, after having freely bewailed the calamities of the Church, now, with the view of allaying the bitterness of his grief, purposely breaks forth into the language of praise. As to the words *Amen, and Amen*, I readily grant, that they are here employed to distinguish the book.<sup>561</sup> But whoever composed this psalm, there is no doubt, that by these words of rejoicing, the design of the writer was to assuage the greatness of his grief in the midst of his heavy afflictions, that he might entertain the livelier hope of deliverance.

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<sup>560</sup> “De la revelation faite a Samuel.” — *Fr.*

<sup>561</sup> Or, as if our Redeemer were slow-paced, halt, or lame, and his Church should never behold his steps. With this agrees the Chaldee paraphrase: — “The slowness of the footsteps of the feet of thy Messiah or anointed.” Kimchi renders, “the delays of the Messiah;” “the discourse,” he observes, “being of those who say that he will never come.” A similar style of speech has been employed by the enemies of the gospel, as Calvin goes on to observe, who scoffingly asked in the days of the apostles, and who still ask, “Where is the promise of his coming?” 2 Peter 3:4.

## PSALM 90

As Moses is about to treat as well of the brevity and miseries of human life, as of the punishments inflicted upon the people of Israel, in order to minister some consolation for assuaging the grief and fear which the faithful might have entertained upon observing the operation of the common law, to which all mankind are subject, and especially, upon considering their own afflictions, he opens the psalm by speaking of the peculiar grace which God had vouchsafed to his chosen tribes. He next briefly recites, how wretched the condition of men is, if they allow their hearts to rest in this world, especially when God summons them as guilty sinners to his judgment seat. And after he has bewailed, that even the children of Abraham had experienced for a time such severity, that they were almost consumed with sorrow, confiding in God's free favor, by which He had adopted them to himself, he prays that He would deal towards them in a merciful and gracious manner, as he had done in times past, and that he would continue even to the end the ordinary course of his grace.

### *A Prayer of Moses, the man of God.*

It is uncertain whether this psalm was composed by Moses, or whether some one of the prophets framed it into a song for the use of the people, from a formula of prayer written by Moses, and handed down from age to age. It is, however, highly probable, that it is not without some ground ascribed to Moses in the title; and since psalms were in use even in his time, I have no doubt that he was its author.<sup>562</sup> Some maintain that the reason why his name appears in the inscription is, that it was sung by his posterity; but I cannot see why they should have recourse to such a groundless conceit. The epithet, *The man of God*, given to Moses, which is immediately added, clearly confutes them.<sup>563</sup> This honorable designation is expressly applied to him, that his doctrine may have the greater authority. If conjectures are to be admitted, it is probable, that when the time of his death drew near, he ended this prayer to assuage the prolonged sorrow under which the people had almost pined away, and to comfort their hearts, under the accumulation of adversities with which they were oppressed. Although the wonderful goodness of God shone brightly in their deliverance from Egypt, which, burying the miseries formerly endured by them, might have filled them with joy; yet we know that, soon after, it was extinguished by their ingratitude; so that for the space of not less than forty years, they were consumed with continual languor in the wilderness. It was therefore very seasonable for Moses at that time to beseech God that he would deal mercifully and gently with his people, according to the number of the years in which he had afflicted them.

### Psalm 90:1-2

<sup>562</sup> "Pour faire la fin de ce livre troisieme." — *Fr.* "As a conclusion to this third Book." The Psalter, as we have before observed, has been divided by the Hebrews into five books. This is the end of Book 3. See volume 2, page 126, note.

<sup>563</sup> All the ancient versions ascribe this psalm to Moses, and it is generally agreed, that it was written by him. To him also, R. Selomo, and other Jewish commentators, ascribe the nine following psalms; for which they do not appear to have any other foundation but their own absurd canon of criticism, by which they assign all anonymous psalms to that author whose name last occurred in a preceding title. It is evident, for instance, that the 99th psalm, in which the prophet Samuel is mentioned, could not have been written by Moses.

**1.** O Lord! thou hast been our dwelling-place, from generation to generation. **2.** Before the mountains were brought forth, and before thou hadst formed the earth and the world,<sup>564</sup> even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

**1** *O Lord! thou hast been our dwelling-place.* In separating the seed of Abraham by special privilege from the rest of the human family, the Psalmist magnifies the grace of adoption, by which God had embraced them as his children. The object which he has in view in this exordium is, that God would now renew the grace which he had displayed in old time towards the holy patriarchs, and continue it towards their offspring. Some commentators think that he alludes to the tabernacle, because in it the majesty of God was not less conspicuous than if he had dwelt in the midst of the people; but this seems to me to be altogether out of place. He rather comprehends the whole time in which the Fathers sojourned in the land of Canaan. As the tabernacle had not yet continued for the space of forty years, the long duration here mentioned — *our dwelling-place from generation to generation* — would not at all be applicable to it. It is not then intended to recount what God showed himself to be towards the Israelites from the time that he delivered them from Egypt; but what their fathers had experienced him to be in all ages, even from the beginning.<sup>565</sup> Now it is declared that as they had always been pilgrims and wanderers, so God was to them instead of a dwelling-place. No doubt, the condition of all men is unstable upon earth; but we know that Abraham and his posterity were, above all others, sojourners, and as it were exiles. Since, then, they wandered in the land of Canaan till they were brought into Egypt, where they lived only by sufferance from day to day, it was necessary for them to seek for themselves a dwelling-place under the shadow of God, without which they could hardly be accounted inhabitants of the world, since they continued everywhere strangers, and were afterwards led about through many windings and turnings. The grace which the Lord displayed in sustaining them in their wanderings, and shielding them with his hand when they sojourned among savage and cruel nations, and were exposed to injurious treatment at their hands — this grace is extolled by Moses in very striking terms, when he represents God as an abode or dwelling-place to these poor fugitives who were continually wandering from one place to another in quest of lodgings. This grace he magnifies from the length of time during which it had been exercised; for God ceased not to preserve and defend them for the space of more than four hundred years, during which time they dwelt under the wings of his protection.

**2** *Before the mountains were brought forth.* Moses designs to set forth some high and hidden mystery, and yet he seems to speak feebly, and, as it were, in a puerile manner. For who does not know that God existed before the world? This we grant is a truth which all men admit; but we will scarcely find one in a hundred who is thoroughly persuaded that God remains unchangeably the same. God is here contrasted with created beings, who, as all know, are subject to continual changes, so that there is nothing stable under heaven. As, in a particular manner, nothing is fuller of vicissitude than human life, that men may not judge of the nature of God by their own fluctuating condition, he is here placed in a state of settled and undisturbed tranquillity. Thus the everlastingness of which Moses speaks is to be referred not only to the essence of God, but also to his providence, by which he governs the world. Although he subjects the world to many alterations, he remains unmoved;

<sup>564</sup> *Man of God* was a common designation of the Jewish prophets: comp. Judges 13:6; 1 Samuel 2:27; 9:6.

<sup>565</sup> “*The earth and the world.* The latter of those words properly means, the habitable world; that part of the earth which, by its fertility, is capable of supporting inhabitants.” — *Walford*.

and that not only in regard to himself, but also in regard to the faithful, who find from experience, that instead of being wavering, he is steadfast in his power, truth, righteousness, and goodness, even as he has been from the beginning. This eternal and unchangeable steadfastness of God could not be perceived prior to the creation of the world, since there were as yet no eyes to be witnesses of it. But it may be gathered *a posteriori*; for while all things are subject to revolution and incessant vicissitude, his nature continues always the same. There may be also here a contrast between him and all the false gods of the heathen, who have, by little and little, crept into the world in such vast numbers, through the error and folly of men. But I have already shown the object which Moses has in view, which is, that we mistake if we measure God by our own understanding; and that we must mount above the earth, yea, even above heaven itself, whenever we think upon him.

### Psalm 90:3-8

**3.** Thou shalt turn man to destruction, and shalt say, Return, ye sons of Adam. **4.** For a thousand years in thy sight are as yesterday when it is gone, and as a watch in the night. **5.** Thou carriest them away as with a flood, they will be a sleep: in the morning he shall grow as grass: **6.** In the morning it shall flourish and grow: at the evening it shall be cut down, and shall wither. **7.** For we fail by thy anger, and are affrighted by thy indignation. **8.** Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, and our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.

**3** *Thou shalt turn man to destruction.* Moses, in the first place, mentions how frail and transitory is the life of man, and bewails its miseries. This he does, not for the purpose of quarrelling with God, but as an argument to induce him the more readily to exercise his mercy, even as he is elsewhere said to pardon mortal men, when he considers of what they are made, and remembers that they are but dust and grass, (Psalm 103:14.) he compares the course of our life to a ring or circle, because God, placing us upon the earth, turns us about within a narrow circuit, and when we have reached the last point, draws us back to himself in a moment. Others give a different interpretation, namely, that God leads men forth to death, and afterwards restores them at the resurrection. But this subtilty is far-fetched, and does not harmonise with the context. We have here laid down a simple definition of our life, that it is, as it were, a short revolution in which we quickly complete our circle, the last point of which is the termination of our earthly course. This account of human life sets in a clearer light the gracious manner in which God deals with his servants, in adopting them to be his peculiar people, that he may at length gather them together into his everlasting inheritance. Nor is it in vain that it is added, by way of contrast, (verse 4,) *that a thousand years in God's sight are as yesterday* Although we are convinced from experience that men, when they have completed their circle, are forthwith taken out of the world, yet the knowledge of this frailty fails in making a deep impression upon our hearts, because we do not lift our eyes above the world. Whence proceeds the great stupidity of men, who, bound fast to the present state of existence, proceed in the affairs of life as if they were to live two thousand years, but because they do not elevate their conceptions above visible objects? Each man, when he compares himself with others, flatters himself that he will live to a great age. In short, men are so dull as to think that thirty years, or even a smaller number, are, as it were, an eternity; nor are they impressed with the brevity of their life so long as this world

keeps possession of their thoughts. This is the reason why Moses awakens us by elevating our minds to the eternity of God, without the consideration of which we perceive not how speedily our life vanishes away. The imagination that we shall have a long life, resembles a profound sleep in which we are all benumbed, until meditation upon the heavenly life swallow up this foolish fancy respecting the length of our continuance upon earth.

As men are thus blinded, Moses sets before their view God as their judge. O Lord! as if he had said, if men would duly reflect upon that eternity from which thou beholdest these inconstant circlings of the world, they would not make so great account of the present life. But as, instead of seriously considering what is true duration, they rather wilfully turn away their eyes from heaven, this explains why they are so stupid, and look upon one day as if it were a hundred years. Moses' apostrophe to God is emphatic, implying that his patience being exhausted at seeing us so thoughtless, he addresses himself to God; and that it was labor to no purpose for him to speak to the deaf, who would not be taught that they were mortal, no, not even by the proofs of this, which experience was constantly presenting before them. This text is quoted by the Apostle Peter in a sense somewhat different, (2 Peter 3:8,) while at the same time he does not pervert it, for he aptly and judiciously applies the testimony of Moses in illustration of the subject of which he is there treating. The design of Moses is to elevate the minds of men to heaven by withdrawing them from their own gross conceptions. And what is the object of Peter? As many, because Christ does not hasten his coming according to their desire, cast off the hope of the resurrection through the weariness of long delay, he corrects this preposterous impatience by a very suitable remedy. He perceives men's faith in the Divine promises fainting and failing, from their thinking that Christ delays his coming too long. Whence does this proceed, but because they grovel upon the earth? Peter therefore appropriately applies these words of Moses to cure this vice. As the indulgence in pleasures to which unbelievers yield themselves is to be traced to this, that having their hearts too much set upon the world, they do not taste the pleasures of a celestial eternity; so impatience proceeds from the same source. Hence we learn the true use of this doctrine. To what is it owing that we have so great anxiety about our life, that nothing suffices us, and that we are continually molesting ourselves, but because we foolishly imagine that we shall nestle in this world for ever? Again, to what are we to ascribe that extreme fretfulness and impatience, which make our hearts fail in waiting for the coming of Christ, but to their grovelling upon the earth? Let us learn then not to judge according to the understanding of the flesh, but to depend upon the judgment of God; and let us elevate our minds by faith, even to his heavenly throne, from which he declares that this earthly life is nothing. Nor does Moses simply contrast a thousand years with one day, but he contrasts them with *yesterday*, which is already gone; for whatever is still before our eyes has a hold upon our minds, but we are less affected with the recollection of what is past. In regard to the word *watch*, the ancients, as is well known, were accustomed to divide the night into four watches, consisting of three hours each.<sup>566</sup> To express still more forcibly how inconsiderable that which appears to us a long period is in God's eyes, this similitude is added, That a thousand years in his sight differ nothing from three hours of the night, in which men scarcely know whether they are awake or asleep.

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<sup>566</sup> “‘Our home’ — or ‘our dwelling-place.’ This image seems to have a particular reference to the unsettled condition of the Israelites before their establishment in the Land of Promise. ‘Strangers and pilgrims as we have hitherto been, in every succeeding generation, from the days of Abraham; first sojourners in Canaan; then bondsmen in Egypt; now wanderers in this dreary waste; we nevertheless find the comforts of a home and settlement in thy miraculous protection.’” — *Horsley*

**5** *Thou carriest them away as with a flood.* Moses confirms what he had previously said, That men, so long as they are sojourners in this world, perform, as it were, a revolution which lasts only for a moment. I do not limit the expression to *carry away as with a flood* to calamities of a more grievous kind, but consider that death is simply compared in general to a flood; for when we have staid a little while in the world, we forthwith fall into the grave and are covered with earth. Thus death, which is common to all, is with propriety called *an inundation*. While we are breathing the breath of life, the Lord overflows us by death, just as those who perish in a shipwreck are engulfed in the ocean; so that death may be fitly called an invisible deluge. And Moses affirms, that it is then evidently seen that men who flatter themselves that they are possessed of wonderful vigor in their earthly course, are only as a sleep. The comparison of *grass* which is added, amounts to this, That men come forth in the morning as grass springs up, that they become green, or pass away within a short time, when being cut down, they wither and decay. The verbs in the 6th verse being in the singular number, it is better to connect them with the word *grass*. But they may also be appropriately referred to each man; and as it makes little difference as to the sense of the text, whether we make *grass* or *each man* the nominative to the verbs, I am not disposed to expend much labor upon the matter. This doctrine requires to be continually meditated upon; for although we all confess that nothing is more transitory than our life, yet each of us is soon carried away, as it were, by a frantic impulse to picture to his own imagination an earthly immortality. Whoever bears in mind that he is mortal, restrains himself, that instead of having his attention and affections engrossed beyond measure with earthly objects, he may advance with haste to his mark. When we set no limit to our cares, we require to be urged forward by continual goadings, that we may not dream of a thousand lives instead of one, which is but as a shadow that quickly vanishes away.

**7** *For we fail by thy anger.* Moses makes mention of the anger of God advisedly; for it is necessary that men be touched with the feeling of this, in order to their considering in good earnest, what experience constrains them to acknowledge, how soon they finish their course and pass away. He had, however, still another reason for joining together the brevity of human life and the anger of God. Whilst men are by nature so transitory, and, as it were, shadowy, the Israelites were afflicted by the hostile hand of God; and his anger is less supportable by our frail natures, which speedily vanish away, than it would be were we furnished with some tolerable degree of strength.

**8** *Thou hast set our iniquities before thee.* To show that by this complaint he is far from intending to murmur against God, he asserts that the Divine anger, however terrible it had been, was just, inasmuch as the people had provoked it by their iniquities; for those who, when stricken by the Divine hand, are not brought to genuine humiliation, harden themselves more and more. The true way to profit, and also to subdue our pride, is to feel that He is a righteous judge. Accordingly Moses, after having briefly taught that men by nature vanish away like smoke, gathers from thence that it is not to be wondered at if God exanimates and consumes those whom he pursues with his wrath. The manner of the expression by which God is described as showing the tokens of his anger is to be observed — *he sets the iniquities of men before his eyes* Hence it follows, that whatever intermission of punishment we experience ought to be ascribed to the forbearance of God, who buries our sins that he may spare us. The word *alumim*, which I have rendered *our secret sins*, is translated by some, *our youth*; <sup>567</sup> as if Moses had said that the faults committed in

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<sup>567</sup> “In the Indies,” says Sir John Chardin, “the parts of the night are made known, as well by instruments (of music,) in great cities, as by the rounds of the watchmen, who, with cries and small drums, give notice that a fourth part of the night is passed.

youth are brought to remembrance. But this is too forced, and inconsistent with the scope of the passage; for it would destroy the contrast between *secret sins* and *the light of God's countenance*, by which Moses intimates that men hide themselves in darkness, and wrap themselves in many deceits, so long as God does not shine upon them with the light of his judgment; whereas, when he draws them back from their subterfuges, by which they endeavor to escape from him, and sets before his eyes the sins which they hide by hypocrisy, being subdued by fear and dread, they are brought sincerely to humble themselves before him.

### Psalm 90:9-10

**9.** For all our days are passed away in thy indignation: we have spent our years as it were a thought. <sup>568</sup> **10.** In the days of our years there are threescore years and ten: and if through strength they are fourscore years, yet is their pride but labor and grief; for it <sup>569</sup> swiftly passes by, and we fly away.

**9.** *For all our days are passed away in thy indignation.* This might be viewed as a general confirmation of the preceding sentence, That the whole course of man's life is suddenly brought to an end, as soon as God shows himself displeased. But in my opinion Moses rather amplifies what he has said above concerning the rigour of God's wrath, and his strict examination of every case in which he punishes sin. He asserts that this terror which God brought upon his people was not only for a short time, but that it was extended without intermission even to death. He complains that the Jews had almost wasted away by continual miseries; because God neither remitted nor mitigated his anger. It is therefore not surprising to find him declaring that their years passed away like a *tale*, when God's anger rested upon them so unremittingly.

**10.** *In the days of our years there are threescore years and ten.* He again returns to the general doctrine respecting the precariousness of the condition of men, although God may not openly display his wrath to terrify them. "What," says he, "is the duration of life? Truly, if we reckon all our years, we will at length come to threescore and ten, or, if there be some who are stronger and more vigorous, they will bring us even to fourscore." Moses uses the expression, *the days of our years*, for the sake of emphasis; for when the time is divided into small portions, the very number itself deceives us, so that we flatter ourselves that life is long. With the view of overthrowing these vain delusions, he permits men to sum up the many thousand days <sup>570</sup> which are in a few years; while he at the same time affirms that this great heap is soon brought to nothing. Let men then extend the space of their life as much as they please, by calculating that each year contains three hundred and sixty-five days; yet assuredly they will find that the term of seventy years is short.

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Now, as these cries awaked those who had slept all that quarter part of the night, it appeared to them but as a moment." — *Harmer's Observations*, volume 1, page 333. If this psalm was the production of Moses, it is observable that night watches were in use in his time.

<sup>568</sup> Archbishop Secker supposes that this may be the reading, and refers to Job 20:11.

<sup>569</sup> "Ou, une parole." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, a word." Dr Adam Clarke reads, "We consume our years like a groan;" and observes, "We live a dying, whining, complaining life; and at last a *groan* is its termination! How amazingly expressive!"

<sup>570</sup> "Pource que nostre vie." — *Fr.* "For our life."



When they have made a lengthened calculation of the days, this is the sum in which the process ultimately results. He who has reached the age of fourscore years hastens to the grave. Moses himself lived longer, (Deuteronomy 34:7,) <sup>571</sup> and so perhaps did others in his time; but he speaks here of the ordinary term. And even then, those were accounted old men, and in a manner decrepit, who attained to the age of fourscore years; so that he justly declares that it is the robust only who arrive at that age. He puts *pride for the strength or excellence* of which men boast so highly. The sense is, that before men decline and come to old age, even in the very bloom of youth they are involved in many troubles, and that they cannot escape from the cares, weariness, sorrows, fears, griefs, inconveniences, and anxieties, to which this mortal life is subject. Moreover, this is to be referred to the whole course of our existence in the present state. And assuredly, he who considers what is the condition of our life from our infancy until we descend into the grave, will find troubles and turmoil in every part of it. The two Hebrew words , *amal*, and , *aven*, which are joined together, are taken passively for *inconveniences* and *afflictions*; implying that the life of man is full of labor, and fraught with many torments, and that even at the time when men are in the height of their pride. The reason which is added, *for it swiftly passes by, and we fly away*, seems hardly to suit the scope of the passage; for felicity may be brief, and yet on that account it does not cease to be felicity. But Moses means that men foolishly glory in their excellence, since, whether they will or no, they are constrained to look to the time to come. And as soon as they open their eyes, they see that they are dragged and carried forward to death with rapid haste, and that their excellence is every moment vanishing away.

### Psalm 90:11-13

**11.** Who knoweth the power of thy anger? and according to thy fear, so is thy wrath. **12.** Teach us so <sup>572</sup> to number our days, and we shall apply our hearts to wisdom. **13.** Return, O Jehovah! how long? Be pacified towards thy servants.

<sup>571</sup> In the Latin version it is, "multa annorum millia;" "many thousand years." But this is evidently a mistake, which the French version corrects, reading "beaucoup de milliers de jours."

<sup>572</sup> Moses, as we learn from the passage to which Calvin refers, "was an hundred and twenty years old when he died, his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated." He was eighty years old when God made him captain of the chosen people; and Aaron was eighty-three years old before he was made High Priest, Exodus 7:7. These, and a few other similar cases, have led many to conclude that the age of eighty was not considered at that time the age of decrepitude; and consequently that this psalm, which limits the average length of human life to seventy or eighty years, must be of a later date than the time of Moses. But this is no valid argument against his being its penman. According to Calvin, seventy or eighty years was at that time, in general, the utmost limits of human life; and the longevity of Moses and some others who exceeded that limit was an exception to the general rule. If this should be called in question, it might be observed that this psalm treats of the afflictions and brevity of life, not in reference to all men absolutely, but with respect to the Israelites in particular, who, on account of their murmuring at the report of the spies who had been sent to spy out the land of Canaan, and other sins, provoked God to swear in his wrath that the carcasses of all that were numbered of them according to their whole number, from twenty years old and upwards, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, should fall in the wilderness during the forty years of their wandering in it, (Numbers 14:27-29.) Few of them, therefore, could have exceeded or even reached the age of fourscore years. It has been thought by some that at that time human life all over the world was reduced to the measure here specified, as its average standard. "The decree which abbreviated the life of man as a general rule to seventy or eighty years," observes Dr J. M. Good, "was given as a chastisement upon the whole race of Israelites in the wilderness. It does not appear that the term of life was lengthened afterwards. Samuel died about seventy years old, David under seventy-one, and Solomon under sixty; and the history of the world shows that the abbreviation of life in other countries was nearly in the same proportion."

**11.** *Who knoweth, the power of thy anger?* Moses again returns to speak of the peculiar afflictions of the Israelites; for he had also on this occasion complained before of the common frailty and miseries of mankind. He justly exclaims that the power of God's wrath is immeasurably great. So long as God withholds his hand, men wantonly leap about like runaway slaves, who are no longer afraid at the sight of their master; nor can their rebellious nature be reduced to obedience in any other way than by his striking them with the fear of his judgment. The meaning then is, that whilst God hides himself, and, so to speak, dissembles his displeasure, men are inflated with pride, and rush upon sin with reckless impetuosity; but when they are compelled to feel how dreadful his wrath is, they forget their loftiness, and are reduced to nothing. What follows, *According to thy fear, so is thy wrath*, is commonly explained as denoting that the more a man is inspired with reverence towards God, the more severely and sternly is he commonly dealt with; for "judgment begins at the house of God," (1 Peter 4:17.) Whilst he pampers the reprobate with the good things of this life, he wastes his chosen ones with continual troubles; and in short, "whom he loveth he chasteneth," (Hebrews 12:6.) It is then a true and profitable doctrine that he deals more roughly with those who serve him than with the reprobate. But Moses, I think, has here a different meaning, which is, that it is a holy awe of God, and that alone, which makes us truly and deeply feel his anger. We see that the reprobate, although they are severely punished, only chafe upon the bit, or kick against God, or become exasperated, or are stupified, as if they were hardened against all calamities; so far are they from being subdued. And though they are full of trouble, and cry aloud, yet the Divine anger does not so penetrate their hearts as to abate their pride and fierceness. The minds of the godly alone are wounded with the wrath of God; nor do they wait for his thunderbolts, to which the reprobate hold out their hard and iron necks, but they tremble the very moment when God moves only his little finger. This I consider to be the true meaning of the prophet. He had said that the human mind could not sufficiently comprehend the dreadfulness of the Divine wrath. And we see how, although God shakes heaven and earth, many notwithstanding, like the giants of old, treat this with derision, and are actuated by such brutish arrogance, that they despise him when he brandishes his bolts. But as the Psalmist is treating of a doctrine which properly belongs to true believers, he affirms that they have a strongly sensitive feeling of the wrath of God which makes them quietly submit themselves to his authority. Although to the wicked their own conscience is a tormentor which does not suffer them to enjoy repose, yet so far is this secret dread from teaching them to humble themselves, that it excites them to clamor against God with increasing frowardness. In short, the faithful alone are sensible of God's wrath; and being subdued by it, they acknowledge that they are nothing, and with true humility devote themselves wholly to Him. This is wisdom to which the reprobate cannot attain, because they cannot lay aside the pride with which they are inflated. They are not touched with the feeling of God's wrath, because they do not stand in awe of him.

**12.** *Teach us so to number our days.* Some translate to *the number of our days*, which gives the same sense. As Moses perceived that what he had hitherto taught is not comprehended by the understandings of men until God shine upon them by his Spirit, he now sets himself to prayer. It indeed seems at first sight absurd to pray that we may know the number of our years. What? since even the strongest scarcely reach the age of fourscore years, is there any difficulty in reckoning up so small a sum? Children learn numbers as soon as they begin to prattle; and we do not need a teacher in arithmetic to enable us to count the length of a hundred upon our fingers. So much the

fouler and more shameful is our stupidity in never comprehending the short term of our life. Even he who is most skillful in arithmetic, and who can precisely and accurately understand and investigate millions of millions, is nevertheless unable to count fourscore years in his own life. It is surely a monstrous thing that men can measure all distances without themselves, that they know how many feet the moon is distant from the center of the earth, what space there is between the different planets; and, in short, that they can measure all the dimensions both of heaven and earth; while yet they cannot number threescore and ten years in their own case. It is therefore evident that Moses had good reason to beseech God for ability to perform what requires a wisdom which is very rare among mankind. The last clause of the verse is also worthy of special notice. By it he teaches us that we then truly apply our hearts to wisdom when we comprehend the shortness of human life. What can be a greater proof of madness than to ramble about without proposing to one's self any end? True believers alone, who know the difference between this transitory state and a blessed eternity, for which they were created, know what ought to be the aim of their life. No man then can regulate his life with a settled mind, but he who, knowing the end of it, that is to say death itself, is led to consider the great purpose of man's existence in this world, that he may aspire after the prize of the heavenly calling.

**13. Return, O Jehovah! how long?** After having spoken in the language of complaint, Moses adds a prayer, That God, who had not ceased for a long time severely to punish his people, would at length be inclined to deal gently with them. Although God daily gave them in many ways some taste of his love, yet their banishment from the land of promise was a very grievous affliction; for it admonished them that they were unworthy of that blessed inheritance which he had appointed for his children. They could not fail often to remember that dreadful oath which he had thundered out against them,

“Surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it: But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness,”  
(Numbers 14:23, 32.)<sup>573</sup>

Moses, no doubt, combines that sore bondage which they had suffered in Egypt with their wanderings in the wilderness; and therefore he justly bewails their protracted languishing in the words *how long?* As God is said to turn his back upon us, or to depart to a distance from us, when he withdraws the tokens of his favor, so by his return we are to understand the manifestation of his grace. The word *nacham*, which we have translated *be pacified*, signifies to *repent*, and may therefore not improperly be explained thus: Let it repent thee concerning thy servants. According to the not unfrequent and well known phraseology of Scripture, God is said to repent, when putting away men's sorrow, and affording new ground of gladness, he appears as it were to be changed. Those, however, seem to come nearer the mind of the Psalmist who translate, *Comfort thyself over thy servants*; for God, in cherishing us tenderly, takes no less pleasure in us than does a father in his own children. Now that is nothing else than to be pacified or propitious, as we have translated it, to make the meaning the more obvious.

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<sup>573</sup> “There is an ambiguity in *nacham*, as it denotes either *so* or *rightly*. Hence the interpretation is twofold; either ‘so make us to know that we may cause a heart of wisdom to come,’ *i e.*, so instruct us that we may acquire a wise heart. Or, ‘teach us to number our days rightly,’ etc. LXX. give it another and distorted interpretation.” — *Bythner*

### Psalm 90:14-17

**14.** Sate us early <sup>574</sup> with thy goodness, and we will be glad and rejoice all our days. **15.** Make us joyful according to the days of our affliction; according to the years in which we have seen evil. **16.** Let thy work appear towards thy servants, and thy glory upon their children. **17.** And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; and direct the work of our hands upon us; yea, direct thou the work of our hands.

**16** *Let thy work appear towards thy servants.* As God, when he forsakes his Church, puts on as it were a character different from his own, Moses, with much propriety, calls the blessing of protection which had been divinely promised to the children of Abraham *God's proper work*. Although, therefore, God's work was manifest in all the instances in which he had punished the perfidiousness, ingratitude, obstinacy, unruly lusts, and unhallowed desires of his people, yet Moses, by way of eminence, prefers before all other proofs of God's power, that care which he exercised in maintaining the welfare of the people, by which it was his will that he should be principally known. This is the reason why Paul, in Romans 9:23, especially applies to the Divine goodness the honorable title of "glory." God indeed maintains his glory by judging the world; but as nothing is more natural to him than to show himself gracious, his glory on that account is said to shine forth chiefly in his benefits. With respect to the present passage, God had then only begun to deliver his people; for they had still to be put in possession of the land of Canaan. Accordingly, had they gone no farther than the wilderness, the lustre of their deliverance would have been obscured. Besides, Moses estimates the work of God according to the Divine promise; and doing this he affirms that it will be imperfect and incomplete, unless he continue his grace even to the end. This is expressed still more plainly in the second clause of the verse, in which he prays not only for the welfare of his own age, but also for the welfare of the generation yet unborn. His exercise thus corresponds with the form of the covenant,

"And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenants to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee,"  
(Genesis 17:7.)

By this example we are taught, that in our prayers we ought to extend our care to those who are to come after us. As God has promised that the Church will be perpetuated even to the end of the world, — a subject which was brought under our notice in the preceding psalm, — this ought, in a special manner, to lead us in all the prayers by which we commend the welfare of the Church to him, to include, at the same time, our posterity who are yet unborn. Farther, the words *glory* and *beauty* are to be particularly noticed: from which we learn that the love which God bears towards us is unparalleled. Although, in enriching us with his gifts he gains nothing for himself; yet he would have the splendor and beauty of his character manifested in dealing bountifully with us, as if his beauty were obscured when he ceases to do us good. In the clause immediately succeeding, *Direct the work of our hands upon us*, Moses intimates that we cannot undertake or attempt anything with the prospect of success, unless God become our guide and counsellor, and govern us by his Spirit. Whence it follows, that the reason why the enterprises and efforts of worldly men have a

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<sup>574</sup> The great mortality constantly taking place among them could not but remind them of this oath. Dimock calculates that the number of persons who died in the wilderness, from twenty years old and upwards, was one year with another near 15,000.

disastrous issue is, because, in not following God, they pervert all order and throw everything into confusion. Nor is the word *alenu, upon us*, superfluous; for although God converts to good in the end whatever Satan and the reprobate plot and practice against him or his people; yet the Church, in which God rules with undisturbed sway, has in this respect a special privilege. By his providence, which to us is incomprehensible, he directs his work in regard to the reprobate externally; but he governs his believing people internally by his Holy Spirit; and therefore he is properly said to order or direct the work of their hands. The repetition shows that a continual course of perseverance in the grace of God is required. It would not be enough for us to be brought to the midst of our journey. He must enable us to complete the whole course. Some translate, *confirm* or *establish*; and this sense may be admitted. I have, however, followed that translation which was more agreeable to the context, conceiving the prayer to be that God would direct to a prosperous issue all the actions and undertakings of his people.

# PSALM 91

In this psalm we are taught that God watches over the safety of his people, and never fails them in the hour of danger. They are exhorted to advance through all perils, secure in the confidence of his protection. The truth inculcated is one of great use, for though many talk much of God's providence, and profess to believe that he exercises a special guardianship over his own children, few are found actually willing to intrust their safety to him.<sup>575</sup>

## Psalm 91:1-4

**1.** He that dwelleth in the secret place of the High One shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. **2.** I will say to Jehovah, He is my hope and my fortress: my God; in him will I hope. **3.** Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, from the noxious pestilence. **4.** He shall protect thee with his wings, and under his feathers shalt thou be safe; his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

**1** *He that dwelleth in the secret place of the High One.* Some Hebrew interpreters read the three first verses as one continuous sentence, down to the words, *he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler*. The whole would then run thus — “He who dwells in the covert of the Most High, and abides under his shadow, to him will I say of Jehovah, that he is his hope and defense, and the God in whom he may safely rest, for he shall deliver him from the snare,” etc. This is evidently a forced construction to put upon the verses, and the reason which has led some to adopt it is weak and insufficient. They consider that the first verse repeats the same thing twice, and therefore conveys no proper meaning. But this is a great mistake; for the inspired penman of the psalm, whoever he may have been, states two ideas quite distinct, That he who is hid under the Divine protection occupies a safe and secure position, where no hostile weapon can reach him. Or should the verse be read — *He who has God to be the guardian of his safety shall rest under the shadow of God;* still the second clause would retain an emphatic meaning, for the power of God would be contrasted with that weak defense which man is able to extend. Those, too, who dwell in the secret place of God are here said by the Psalmist to dwell under his shadow, in the sense that they experience to what a rich extent his protection reaches. Men generally seek out a great-variety of hiding-places, having recourse to one or another, according as the calamities are different which threaten to overtake them; but here we are taught that the only safe and impregnable fortress to which we can betake ourselves is the protection of God. He contrasts the security of those who trust in God with the vanity of all other confidences by which we are apt to delude ourselves.

In the second verse he repeats the truth which he had already inculcated, showing at the same time that he speaks from his personal feeling and experience as a believer. This is very necessary in one who would be a teacher; for we cannot communicate true knowledge unless we deliver it not merely with the lips, but as something which God has revealed to our own hearts.<sup>576</sup> The Psalmist

<sup>575</sup> “*Early, after the dark night of afflictions.*” — *Ainsworth*.

<sup>576</sup> This psalm is allowed to be one of the finest in the whole collection. “Could the Latin or any modern language,” says Simon de Muis, “express thoroughly all the beauties and elegancies as well of the *words* as of the *sentences*, it would not be difficult to persuade the reader that we have no poem, either in Greek or Latin, comparable to this Hebrew ode.” It is supposed by some to have been composed by Moses on the same occasion as the preceding; but others think it was written by David on the occasion

accordingly gives evidence, that what he had taught in the preceding verse accorded with his own inward experience. Some read, *I will say concerning the Lord*, and the Hebrew prefix, , *lamed*, may be so rendered; but the other translation which I have given conveys the more forcible meaning. The believer does more than simply resolve to make God his fortress; he draws near in the trust of the Divine promises, and familiarly addresses God. This confidence in prayer affords an additional proof how securely the people of God can dwell under his shadow. This holy species of boasting constitutes the very highest triumph of faith, when we betake ourselves to God without fear under our worst trials, and are fully persuaded that he answers all our prayers, nay, that we have in him a sufficiency and a superabundance of help.

In verse third the Psalmist expresses his assurance that the trust of which he had spoken would not be vain and delusory, but that God would prove at all times the deliverer of his people. He is evidently to be considered as addressing himself, and in this way encouraging his own heart to hope in the Lord. Some think that by the *snare of the fowler*, spoken of here in connection with *the pestilence*, is to be understood hidden mischief as distinguished from open aggression, and that the Psalmist declares the Divine protection to be sufficient for him, whether Satan should attack him openly and violently or by more secret and subtle methods. I would not reject this interpretation; for though some may think that the words should be taken in their simpler acceptation, the Psalmist most probably intended under these terms to denote all different kinds of evil, and to teach us that God was willing and able to deliver us from any of them.

**4** *He shall protect thee with his wings*. This figure, which is employed in other parts of Scripture, is one which beautifully expresses the singularly tender care with which God watches over our safety. When we consider the majesty of God, there is nothing which would suggest a likeness such as is here drawn between him and the hen or other birds, who spread their wings over their young ones to cherish and protect them. But, in accommodation to our infirmity, he does not scruple to descend, as it were, from the heavenly glory which belongs to him, and to encourage us to approach him under so humble a similitude. Since he condescends in such a gracious manner to our weakness, surely there is nothing to prevent us from coming to him with the greatest freedom. *By the truth of God*, which, the Psalmist says, would be his *shield* and *buckler*, we must understand God's faithfulness, as never deserting his people in the time of their need; still we cannot doubt that he had in his eye the Divine promises, for it is only by looking to these that any can venture to cast themselves upon the protection of God. As, without the word, we cannot come to the enjoyment of that Divine mercy of which the Psalmist had already spoken, he now comes forward himself to bear witness in behalf of it. Formerly, under the comparison of a *fortress*, he had taught that by

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of the pestilence which was inflicted upon the people as a punishment of his sin in numbering them, (2 Samuel 24.) It is ascribed to David in the Septuagint, Chaldee, Vulgate, Syriac, Arabic, and Æthiopic versions. Its subject-matter affords us no assistance in determining who was its inspired author, or on what occasion it was written. "There is, however, no reason," says Walford, "to regret our unacquaintedness with these particulars, as the poem is so clear and intelligible, that nothing in it can be mistaken or misunderstood. The purpose of it is to illustrate the safety and happiness which result from the knowledge of God, and the exercise of a steadfast dependence upon his promise and grace. The sentiments are expressed with great force and beauty; and dead indeed must be the soul to every emotion of spiritual and heavenly delight that fails to be impressed by its truth, or to aim at the acquirement of such faith and reliance upon it as will alone render it productive of the peace and tranquillity of mind which it is intended to bestow. The learned Michaelis is of opinion that this psalm was to be recited in alternate parts by two choruses or sets of singers responding to each other, and that God himself is introduced in verse 14 as taking part of the performance." It is supposed by the Jews to relate to the Messiah. See Matthew 4:6; Luke 4:10, 11.

trusting in God we shall enjoy safety and security; now he compares God to a *shield*, intimating that he will come between us and all our enemies to preserve us from their attacks.

### Psalm 91:5-8

**5.** Thou shalt not fear for the terror of the night; for the arrow that flieth by day; **6.** For the destruction that walketh in darkness; for the pestilence <sup>577</sup> which wasteth at noon-day. <sup>578</sup> **7.** A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; it shall not come nigh thee. **8.** Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked.

*5 Thou shalt not fear for the terror of the night.* The Psalmist continues to insist upon the truth which I have just adverted to, that, if we confide with implicit reliance upon the protection of God, we will be secure from every temptation and assault of Satan. It is of importance to remember, that those whom God has taken under his care are in a state of the most absolute safety. Even those who have reached the most advanced experience find nothing more difficult than to rely upon Divine deliverance; and more especially when, overtaken by some of the many forms in which danger and death await us in this world, doubts will insinuate themselves into our hearts, giving rise to fear and disquietude. There was reason, therefore, why the Psalmist should enter upon a specification of different evils, encouraging the Lord's people to look for more than one mode of deliverance, and to bear up under various and accumulated calamities. Mention is made of *the fear of the night*, because men are naturally apprehensive in the dark, or because the night exposes us to dangers of different kinds, and our fears are apt at such a season to magnify any sound or disturbance. The *arrow*, rather than another weapon, is instanced as flying by day, for the reason apparently that it shoots to a greater distance, and with such swiftness, that we can with difficulty escape it. The verse which follows states, though in different words, the same truth, that there is no kind of calamity which the shield of the Almighty cannot ward off and repel.

*7 A thousand shall fall at thy side.* <sup>579</sup> He proceeds to show that, though the state of all men may to appearance be alike, the believer has the special privilege of being exempted from evils of an imminent and impending nature; for it might be objected that he was but man, and, as such, exposed with others to death in its thousand different forms. To correct this mistake, the Psalmist does not hesitate to assert that, when universal ruin prevails around, the Lord's children are the objects of his distinguishing care, and are preserved amidst the general destruction. The lesson is

<sup>577</sup> "Car ceste est la vraye cognoissance, laquelle nous pouvons bailler aux autres de main en main, quand nous mettons en avant ce que Dieu nous a revele, non point des levres taut seulement: mais aussi du profond du coeur." — *Fr.*

<sup>578</sup> The original word, which Calvin renders "the pestilence," is rendered in the Syriac "the blowing wind." Fry's version has "the blast." "The *simoon*, or hot wind of the desert," he observes, "a phenomenon in those regions too remarkable to have escaped the divine poet in enumerating the sources of danger to human life." This wind being hot and burning in its effects, when it blows at noon-day, must be still more fatal.

<sup>579</sup> "Verses 5 and 6. Jos. Scaliger explains, in Epis. 9, these two verses thus: — *Thou shalt not fear*, . . . *from consternation by night*, . . . *from the arrow flying by day*, . . . *from pestilence walking at evening*, . . . *from devastation at noon* Under these four he comprehends all the evils and dangers to which man is liable. And as the Hebrews divide the four and twenty hours of day and night into four parts, namely, evening, midnight, morning, and mid-day, so he understands the hours of danger to be divided accordingly: in a word, 'that the man, who has made God his refuge,' is always safe, day and night, at every hour, from every danger." — *Bythner*



one which is needed by us all, that, though naturally subject to the common evils which are spread around, we are privileged with a special exemption which secures our safety in the midst of dangers. In the verse succeeding more is meant than merely that the believer will have personal experience of the truth which the Psalmist had stated, actually feeling and seeing with his own eyes that God manages his defense; a new argument is brought forward in support of the truth, which is this, that God, as the righteous judge of the world, cannot but punish the wicked according to their sins, and extend protection to his own children. There is much that is dark in the aspect of things in this world, yet the Psalmist hints that, amidst all the confusion which reigns, we may collect from what we see of God's judgments, that he does not disappoint the expectations of his believing people. He must be considered, however, as addressing those who have eyes to see, who are privileged with the true light of faith, who are fully awake to the consideration of the Divine judgments, and who wait patiently and quietly till the proper time arrive; for most men stagger and confuse their minds upon this subject, by starting to precipitate conclusions, and are prevented from discovering the providence of God by judging according to sense. It becomes us too to be satisfied with apprehending the judgments of God only in some imperfect measure while we remain upon earth, and leaving him to defer the fuller discovery of them to the day of complete revelation.

### Psalm 91:9-12

**9.** Because thou, Jehovah, art my protection; thou hast made the Most High thy refuge. <sup>580</sup> **10.** There shall no evil befall thee, and no plague shall come nigh thy dwelling. **11.** For he has given his angels charge concerning thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. **12.** They shall bear thee upon their hands, lest thou dash thy foot upon a stone,

**9** *Because thou, Jehovah, art my protection.* He dwells at this length in commendation of the providence of God, as knowing how slow men naturally are to resort to God in a right manner; and how much they need to be stimulated to this duty, and to be driven from those false and worldly refuges in which they confide. There is a change of person frequently throughout this psalm: thus, in the first verse, he addresses God, and afterwards addresses himself. God he styles *his protection*, — in this manner, by his own example, recommending others to have recourse to God as their help. So, afterwards, he addresses himself, that he may be the better persuaded of the sincerity of his inward affection. The true method of testing our faith is to turn our thoughts inward upon ourselves, and, when no human eye sees us, to search our own spirits. If, not content with having to do with God only, we turn our eyes to men, it is almost impossible to prevent pride from insinuating itself into the room of faith. He speaks of accounting God to be his *house* or *refuge*, because he defends us from every evil, as in Psalm 90:1. This verse may be considered as connected with that which follows, and as stating the cause or reason of what is there asserted; for it is added, *There shall no evil befall thee*. And how are coming evils averted, but just by our resting with confidence in the

<sup>580</sup> As a signal instance of this preservation, Bishop Horne adduces the well known and exemplary conduct of the good Bishop of Marseilles, who, during the plague in that city in 1720, When nature sickened, and each gale was death, though in constant attendance on the infected and dying thousands, entirely escaped the contagion.

protection of God? Troubles, it is true, of various kinds assail the believer as well as others, but the Psalmist means that God stands between him and the violence of every assault, so as to preserve him from being overwhelmed. The Divine guardianship is represented as extending to the whole *household* of the righteous; and we know that God comprehends under his love the children of such as he has adopted into his fatherly favor. Or, perhaps, the term may be taken in its simpler sense, and nothing more be intended than that those who choose God for their refuge will dwell safely in their *houses*.

**11** *For he has given his angels charge concerning thee.* This is added by the Psalmist expressly with the view of obviating any fears which might arise from our infirmity; so that we cannot fail to be struck with the benignant condescension of God in thus not only forgiving our diffidence, but proposing the means by which it may be best removed. Does he exhibit himself to us as a fortress and shield, proffer the shadow of his protection, make himself known to us as a habitation in which we may abide, and stretch out his wings for our defense — surely we are chargeable with the worst ingratitude if we are not satisfied with promises so abundantly full and satisfactory? If we tremble to think of his majesty, he presents himself to us under the lowly figure of the hen: if we are terrified at the power of our enemies, and the multitude of dangers by which we are beset, he reminds us of his own invincible power, which extinguishes every opposing force. When even all these attempts to encourage us have been tried, and he finds that we still linger and hesitate to approach him, or cast ourselves upon his sole and exclusive protection, he next makes mention of the angels, and proffers them as guardians of our safety. As an additional illustration of his indulgent mercy, and compassion for our weakness, he represents those whom he has ready for our defense as being a numerous host; he does not assign one solitary angel to each saint, but commissions the whole armies of heaven to keep watch over every individual believer. It is the individual believer whom the Psalmist addresses, as we read also Psalm 34:7 — that “angels encamp round about them that fear him.” We may learn from this that there is no truth in the idea that each saint has his own peculiar guardian angel; and it is of no little consequence to consider, that as our enemies are numerous, so also are the friends to whom our defense is intrusted. It were something, no doubt, to know that even one angel was set over us with this commission, but it adds weight to the promise when we are informed that the charge of our safety is committed to a numerous host, as Elisha was enabled, by a like consideration, to despise the great army of adversaries which was arrayed against him, (2 Kings 6:16.) Nor is this inconsistent with passages of Scripture, which seem to speak as if a distinct angel were assigned to each individual. It is evident that God employs his angels in different ways, setting one angel over several whole nations, and again several angels over one man. There is no necessity that we should be nice and scrupulous in inquiring into the exact manner in which they minister together for our safety; it is enough that, knowing from the authority of an apostle the fact of their being appointed ministers to us, we should rest satisfied of their being always intent upon their commission. We read elsewhere of their readiness to obey and execute the commands of God; and this must go to strengthen our faith, since their exertions are made use of by God for our defense.

The Psalmist, in the passage now before us, speaks of members of the Church generally; and yet the devil did not wrest the words when, in his temptation in the wilderness, he applied them particularly to Christ. It is true that he is constantly seeking to pervert and corrupt the truth of God; but, so far as general principles are concerned, he can put a specious gloss upon things, and is a sufficiently acute theologian. It is to be considered that when our whole human family were banished

from the Divine favor, we ceased to have anything in common with the angels, and they to have any communication with us. It was Christ, and he only, who, by removing the ground of separation, reconciled the angels to us; this being his proper office, as the apostle observes, (Ephesians 1:10,) to gather together in one what had been dispersed both in heaven and on earth. This was represented to the holy patriarch Jacob under the figure of a ladder, (Genesis 28:12;) and, in allusion to our being united into one collective body with the angels, Christ said,

“Afterwards ye shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending,” (John 1:51.)

The Psalmist adds, *all your ways* in the plural number, to convey to us more distinctly that wherever we go we may expect that the angels shall always extend their guardianship to us. The course of our life is subject to many windings and changes, and who can tell all the storms by which we are liable to be tossed? It was necessary, therefore, to know that the angels preside over all our particular actions and purposes, and thus to be assured of their safe-conduct in whatever quarter we might be called to move. This expression, however, *your ways*, was, in all likelihood, intended to enjoin upon us a due consideration and modesty, to warn us against tempting God by any rash step, and admonish us to confine ourselves within the bounds of our proper calling. For should we commit ourselves recklessly, and attempt things which the promise of God does not warrant us to undertake, aspiring at what is presumptuous, and opposed to the Divine will, we are not to expect that the angels will become ministers and helps to our temerity. Satan would appear to have craftily omitted this clause when he tempted Christ rashly to throw himself down from the temple.

**12** *They shall bear thee upon their hands.* He gives us a still higher idea of the guardianship of the angels, informing us, that they not only watch lest any evil should befall us, and are on the alert to extend assistance, but bear up our steps with their hands, so as to prevent us from stumbling in our course. Were we to judge indeed by mere appearances, the children of God are far from being thus borne up aloft in their career; often they labor and pant with exertion, occasionally they stagger and fall, and it is with a struggle that they advance in their course; but as in the midst of all this weakness it is only by the singular help of God that they are preserved every moment from falling and from being destroyed, we need not wonder that the Psalmist should speak in such exalted terms of the assistance which they receive through the ministrations of angels. Never, besides, could we surmount the serious obstacles which Satan opposes to our prayers, unless God should bear us up in the manner here described. Let any one combine together the two considerations which have been mentioned, — our own utter weakness on the one hand, and on the other the roughness, the difficulties, the thorns which beset our way, the stupidity besides which characterises our hearts, and the subtlety of the evil one in laying snares for our destruction, — and he will see that the language of the Psalmist is not that of hyperbole, that we could not proceed one step did not the angels bear us up in their hands in a manner beyond the ordinary course of nature. That we frequently stumble is owing to our own fault in departing from him who is our head and leader. And though God suffers us to stumble and fall in this manner that he may convince us how weak we are in ourselves, yet, inasmuch as he does not permit us to be crushed or altogether overwhelmed, it is virtually even then as if he put his hand under us and bore us up.

## Psalm 91:13-16

**13.** Thou shalt walk over the lion and asp, the young lion and dragon shalt thou trample under feet. **14.** Because he hath trusted in me, I will deliver him; because he hath known my name, I will set him on high. **15.** He shall call upon me, and I shall answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and glorify him. **16.** With length of days will I satisfy him, and I will show him my salvation.

**13.** *Thou shalt walk over the lion and asp.* The same truth is here expressed in different words. He had already spoken of the obstacles which Satan throws in our course under the figure of a *stone*. Now he speaks of the formidable troubles to which we are exposed in the world under the figures of the *asp*, *lion*, *young lion*, and *dragon*. So long as we are here we may be truly said to walk amongst wild beasts, and such as threaten us with destruction. And in this case what would become of us did not God promise to make us victorious over the manifold evils which everywhere impend us? None who seriously considers the temptations to which he is liable will wonder that the Psalmist, with the view of removing apprehension from the minds of the Lord's people, should have adopted the language of hyperbole; nor indeed will he say that it is the language of hyperbole, but a true and exact representation of their case. We boast much of our courage so long as we remain at a distance from the scene of danger; but no sooner are we brought into action, than in the smallest matters we conjure up to ourselves lions, and dragons, and a host of frightful dangers. The Psalmist accommodates his language to this infirmity of our carnal apprehension. The Hebrew word שַׁחַל, *shachal*, which in the Septuagint is rendered *asp*,<sup>581</sup> signifies *a lion*, and such repetition in the second member of the sentence is usual in the Hebrew. There is therefore no occasion for seeking any nice distinction which may have been intended in specifying these four different kinds of animals; only by *the lion* and *young lion* we are evidently to understand more open dangers, where we are assailed by force and violence, and by *the serpent* and *dragon* hidden mischiefs, where the enemy springs upon us insidiously and unexpectedly, as the serpent from its lurking place.<sup>582</sup>

<sup>581</sup> Calvin's reading of this verse is different from that of our English Bible. According to it, *thou*, in the first clause, refers to the Psalmist; while, according to him, it is to be understood of God. Hammond gives a similar version. "Because thou, O Lord! art my hope; thou hast made the Most High thy help *or* refuge." All the ancient versions understand the first clause as spoken of God. In the Septuagint it is σὺ Κύριε ἡ ἔλπις μου, "thou, O Lord! art my hope." Similar is the reading of the Chaldee, the Syriac, and Vulgate. But the last member of the verse, "thou hast made the Most High thy refuge," is generally referred to the Psalmist, and regarded as a part of a soliloquy to which, when alone, his soul gave utterance.

<sup>582</sup> ἀσπίδα. The most ancient versions correspond in this respect with the Septuagint, as the Vulgate, St Jerome's, Apollinaris', the Syriac, Arabic, and Æthiopic versions, rendering שַׁחַל, *shachal*, not by *the lion* but by *the asp*, though they are not agreed as to the particular kind of asp which is intended. This opinion is adopted by the learned Bochart, (Hieroz. volume 3, lib. 3, cap. 3,) who thinks it probable that throughout the verse serpents only are spoken of, and other interpreters have concurred in the same view. He thinks שַׁחַל, *shachal*, rendered "the lion," is the *black serpent*, or hoemorrhous; and אֲרִיִּים, *kepher*, rendered "young lion," has been supposed to be the *cenchrus*, which Nicander (*Theriac*, 5, 463) calls λέων ἄιολος, *the spotted lion*, because he is speckled, and, like the lion, raises his tail when about to fight, and bites and gluts himself with blood. Bochart objects to *the lion* and *young lion* being meant, on the ground of the incongruity of animals of so very different a nature as lions and serpents being joined together; and observes, that to *walk upon the lion* seems not a very proper expression, as men do not in walking tread on lions as they do on serpents. But *the lion* and the *young lion*, the rendering of later interpreters, correspond to each other, and preserve the parallelism for which the Hebrew poetry is distinguished, and the reasons assigned by Bochart for setting it aside seem insufficient. The lion and the serpent are formidable animals to contend with; and Satan, one of the enemies to be "put in subjection under the feet of Christ," is, in the New Testament, compared both to the lion and the dragon, (1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:9.) "Let it be added," says Merrick, "that the Hebrew text says nothing of *walking upon the lion*, but has the word

**14.** *Because he hath trusted in me, I will deliver him.* It may prevent any feeling of disgust or weariness under the repetition and enlargement of the Psalmist upon his present subject, to remember, that, as I have already observed, he is influenced in this by a due consideration of our weakness, ever indisposed, as we are upon the approach of danger, to exercise a due reliance upon the providence of God. With this view he now introduces God himself as speaking, and confirming by his own voice what had already been asserted. And here it is noticeable that God, in declaring from heaven that we shall be safe under the wings of his protection, speaks of nothing as necessary on the part of his people but hope or trust. For the Hebrew verb , *chashak*, which signifies to desire, or love, or, as we commonly express it, to find our delight in any object, means here to rest with a sweet confidence in God, and rejoice in his favor. He engages to extend us assistance, if we seek him in sincerity. The language implies that we must be continually surrounded by death and destruction in this world, unless his hand is stretched out for our preservation. Occasionally he assists even unbelievers, but it is only to his believing people that his help is vouchsafed, in the sense of his being their Savior to the true extent of that term, and their Savior to the end. Their *knowing the name* of God is spoken of in connection with their trust and expectation; and very properly, for why is it that men are found casting their eyes vainly round them to every quarter in the hour of danger, but because they are ignorant of the power of God? They cannot indeed be said to know God at all, but delude themselves with a vague apprehension of something which is not God, a mere dead idol substituted for him in their imaginations. As it is a true knowledge of God which begets confidence in him, and leads us to call upon him; and as none can seek him sincerely but those who have apprehended the promises, and put due honor upon his name, the Psalmist with great propriety and truth represents this knowledge as being the spring or fountain of trust. That the doctrine which he teaches was needful we may learn from the senseless and erroneous manner in which the Papists speak of faith. While they inculcate an implicit adherence to God, they bury the word which opens up the only access which men can have to him. The expression to *exalt* or *lift up on high* means no more than to keep in a state of safety or security; but the reason of this metaphor is, that God preserves his people in an extraordinary manner, raising them, as it were, to some high and impregnable fortress.

**15.** *He shall call upon me.* He now shows more clearly what was meant by trusting in God, or placing our love and delight in him. For that affection and desire which is produced by faith, prompts us to call upon his name. This is another proof in support of the truth, which I had occasion to touch upon formerly, that prayer is properly grounded upon the word of God. We are not at liberty in this matter, to follow the suggestions of our own mind or will, but must seek God only in so far as he has in the first place invited us to approach him. The context, too, may teach us, that faith is not idle or inoperative, and that one test, by which we ought to try those who look for Divine deliverances, is, whether they have recourse to God in a right manner. We are taught the additional lesson, that believers will never be exempt from troubles and embarrassments. God does not promise them a life of ease and luxury, but deliverance from their tribulations. Mention is made of his

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, which strictly signifies *calcabis, thou shalt tread*; and as to *trample on the nations*, and to *make his enemies his footstool*, are expressions used to signify the subduing and triumphing over them; to tread on the lion and the serpent may be understood in the same sense."

Cresswell thinks it probable that the language of this verse is proverbial. "The course of human life," he remarks, "is in Scripture compared to a journey; and the dangers described in this verse were common to the wayfaring man in the Psalmist's time and country."

*glorifying* them, intimating that the deliverance which God extends, and which has been spoken of in this psalm, is not of a mere temporary nature, but will issue at last in their being advanced to perfect happiness. He puts much honor upon them in the world, and glorifies himself in them conspicuously, but it is not till the completion of their course that he affords them ground for triumph. It may seem strange that *length of days* should be mentioned in the last verse as promised to them, since many of the Lord's people are soon taken out of the world. But I may repeat an observation which has been elsewhere made, that those Divine blessings which are promised in relation to the present perishing world, are not to be considered as made good in a universal and absolute sense, or fulfilled in all according to one set and equal rule.<sup>583</sup> Wealth and other worldly comforts must be looked upon as affording some experience of the Divine favor or goodness, but it does not follow that the poor are objects of the Divine displeasure; soundness of body and good health are blessings from God, but we must not conceive on this account that he regards with disapprobation the weak and the infirm. Long life is to be classed among benefits of this kind, and would be bestowed by God upon all his children, were it not for their advantage that they should be taken early out of the world.<sup>584</sup> They are more satisfied with the short period during which they live than the wicked, though their life should be extended for thousands of years. The expression cannot apply to the wicked, that they are *satisfied with length of days*; for however long they live, the thirst of their desires continues to be unquenched. It is life, and nothing more, which they riot in with such eagerness; nor can they be said to have had one moment's enjoyment of that Divine favor and goodness which alone can communicate true satisfaction. The Psalmist might therefore with propriety state it as a privilege peculiarly belonging to the Lord's people, that they are *satisfied with life*. The brief appointed term is reckoned by them to be sufficient, abundantly sufficient. Besides, longevity is never to be compared with eternity. The salvation of God extends far beyond the narrow boundary of earthly existence; and it is to this, whether we live or come to die, that we should principally look. It is with such a view that the Psalmist, after stating all the other benefits which God bestows, adds this as a last clause, that when he has followed them with his fatherly goodness throughout their lives, he at last shows them his salvation.

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<sup>583</sup> "Dei benedictiones quae ad hanc caducam vitam spectant, non esse perpetuas, neque aequali tenore fluere." — *Lat.* "Ne sont pas perpetuelles, et ne descoulent pas d'un fil continuel." — *Fr.*

<sup>584</sup> "*With long life*, etc. This was a blessing often pledged to good men during the Mosaic dispensation; though we cannot understand it as being universally accomplished, because God at that, as at every subsequent period, has reserved to himself, and to his own wisdom, 'the times and the seasons.'" — *Walford*.

# PSALM 92

This psalm contains an exhortation to praise God, and shows how much ground we have for this exercise from the works of God, insisting, especially, upon his justice, displayed in the protection of his people, and the destruction of the wicked. By such truth it encourages to the practice of righteousness, and preserves us from fainting under the cross of Christ, by proposing to our view a happy issue out of all our afflictions. To deter us, on the other hand, from the commission of iniquity it declares that sinners, however they may prosper for a time, will speedily be destroyed.

*A Song for the Sabbath-day.*

## Psalm 92:1-4

**1.** It is good to give thanks unto Jehovah, to sing praises unto thy name, O Most High! **2.** To show forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness in the night, **3.** Upon the psaltery, and upon the hand instrument, with the song upon the harp. **4.** For thou, Jehovah, hast made me glad in thy works; I will triumph in the works of thy hands.

**1** *It is good to give thanks unto Jehovah.* There is no reason to doubt that the Jews were in the habit of singing this psalm, as the inscription bears, upon the Sabbath-day, and it is apparent, from different passages, that other psalms were applied to this use. As the words may be read literally in the Hebrew, *it is good for giving thanks unto the Lord*, some interpreters, founding upon the letter *lamed*, prefixed to the verb, understand the Psalmist to mean that it was good to have a certain day set apart for singing the praises of God — that it was a useful arrangement by which one day had been chosen to be occupied by the Lord's people in celebrating his works. But it is well known that this letter, when prefixed, is merely the ordinary mark of the infinitive mood — and I have given what is obviously the simple meaning. The reason why the Psalmist appropriated this psalm to the Sabbath is sufficiently obvious. That day is not to be holy, in the sense of being devoted to idleness, as if this could be an acceptable worship to God, but in the sense of our separating ourselves from all other occupations, to engage in meditating upon the Divine works. As our minds are inconstant, we are apt, when exposed to various distractions, to wander from God.<sup>585</sup> We need to be disentangled from all cares if we would seriously apply ourselves to the praises of God. The Psalmist then would teach us that the right observance of the Sabbath does not consist in idleness, as some absurdly imagine, but in the celebration of the Divine name. The argument which he adduces is drawn from the profitableness of the service, for nothing is more encouraging than to know that our labor is not in vain, and that what we engage in meets with the Divine approbation. In the succeeding verse, he adverts to the grounds which we have for praising God, that we may not imagine that God calls upon us to engage in this service without reason, or simply in consideration of his greatness and power, but in remembrance of his *goodness* and *faithfulness*, which should inflame our hearts to such exercise, if we had any proper sense and experience of them. He would have us consider, in mentioning these, that not only is God worthy of praise, but that we ourselves are chargeable with ingratitude and perversity should we refuse it. We are the proper objects of his faithfulness and goodness, and it would argue inexcusable

<sup>585</sup> “Car selon que nos pensees sont volages, si elles sont distraites ca et la, elles s’alienent facilement de Dieu.”

indifference if they did not elicit our cordial praises. It might seem a strange distinction which the Psalmist observes when he speaks of our announcing God's goodness in the *morning*, and his faithfulness *at night*. His goodness is constant, and not peculiar to any one season, why then devote but a small part of the day to the celebration of it? And the same may be said of the other Divine perfection mentioned, for it is not merely in the night that his faithfulness is shown. But this is not what the Psalmist intends. He means that beginning to praise the Lord from earliest dawn, we should continue his praises to the latest hour of the night, this being no more than his goodness and faithfulness deserve.<sup>586</sup> If we begin by celebrating his goodness, we must next take up the subject of his faithfulness. Both will occupy our continued praises, for they stand mutually and inseparably connected. The Psalmist is not therefore to be supposed as wishing us to separate the one from the other, for they are intimately allied; he would only suggest that we can never want matter for praising God unless indolence prevail over us, and that if we would rightly discharge the office of gratitude, we must be assiduous in it, since his goodness and his faithfulness are incessant.

In the fourth verse, he more immediately addresses the Levites, who were appointed to the office of singers, and calls upon them to employ their instruments of music — not as if this were in itself necessary, only it was useful as an elementary aid to the people of God in these ancient times.<sup>587</sup> We are not to conceive that God enjoined the harp as feeling a delight like ourselves in mere melody of sounds; but the Jews, who were yet under age, were astricted to the use of such childish elements. The intention of them was to stimulate the worshippers, and stir them up more actively to the celebration of the praise of God with the heart. We are to remember that the worship of God was never understood to consist in such outward services, which were only necessary to help forward a people, as yet weak and rude in knowledge, in the spiritual worship of God. A difference is to be observed in this respect between his people under the Old and under the New Testament; for now that Christ has appeared, and the Church has reached full age, it were only to bury the light of the Gospel, should we introduce the shadows of a departed dispensation. From this, it appears that the Papists, as I shall have occasion to show elsewhere, in employing instrumental music, cannot be said so much to imitate the practice of God's ancient people, as to ape it in a senseless and absurd manner, exhibiting a silly delight in that worship of the Old Testament which was figurative, and terminated with the Gospel.<sup>588</sup>

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<sup>586</sup> “Que si nous commencons au matin de louer Dieu, il faut continuer ses louanges jusques a la derniere partie de la nuit; pource que sa bonte et fidelite meritent cela.” — *Fr.*

<sup>587</sup> “Mais pource que c'estoit un rudiment fort utile au peuple ancien.” — *Fr.*

<sup>588</sup> But although Calvin held the use of instrumental music in public worship to be inconsistent with the genius of the Christian dispensation, he regarded the celebration of the praises of God with the melody of the human voice as an institution of great solemnity and usefulness. He knew that psalm-singing is sanctioned by the apostles, and that music has a powerful influence in exciting the mind to ardor of devotion; and to him belongs the merit of having, with the advice of Luther, formed the plan of establishing, as a principal branch of public worship in the Reformed Churches, the singing of psalms, translated into the vernacular language, and adapted to plain and easy melodies, which all the people might learn, and in which they all might join. Immediately upon the publication of Clement Marot's version of David's Psalms into French rhymes at Paris, he introduced it into his congregation at Geneva, set to plain and popular music; and it soon came into universal use throughout the numerous congregations of the Reformed Church of France. At length Marot's Psalms formed an appendix to the Catechism at Geneva, and became a characteristic mark or badge of the Calvinistic worship and profession. Marot's translation, which did not aim at any innovation in the public worship, and which he dedicated to his master Francis I., and the ladies of France, received at first the sanction of the Sorbonne, as containing nothing contrary to sound doctrine. But Calvin knew the character of the book better than the doctors of the Sorbonne, and having, by his influence, obtained its introduction into the worship of the Protestant Church of France, it contributed so much, in consequence of its extraordinary popularity, to the advancement of the Reformed cause in



**4** *Because thou, Jehovah, hast made me glad.* The Psalmist repeats the truth that the Sabbath was not prescribed as a day of idleness, but a season when we should collect our whole energies for meditation upon the works of God. He intimates, at the same time, that those are best qualified for celebrating the praises of God who recognize and feel his fatherly goodness, and can undertake this service with willing and joyful minds. His language implies that the goodness and faithfulness of God, which he had already mentioned, are apparent in his works upon a due examination of them. What produces joy in our hearts is the exhibition which God gives of himself as a Father, and of his deep and watchful anxiety for our welfare; as, on the other hand, the cause of our brutish indifference is our inability to savor or relish the end designed in the works of God.<sup>589</sup> As the universe proclaims throughout that God is faithful and good, it becomes us to be diligently observant of these tokens, and to be excited by a holy joy to the celebration of his praise.

### Psalm 92:5-8

**5.** O Jehovah! how magnificent are thy works! thy thoughts are very deep. **6.** The foolish man shall not know them, neither shall the man void of wisdom understand them. **7.** When the wicked flourish as the grass, and all the workers of iniquity spring up, that they may perish for ever. **8.** And thou, O Jehovah! art exalted for evermore.

**5** *O Jehovah! how highly exalted are thy works!* The Psalmist, having spoken of the works of God in general, proceeds to speak more particularly of his justice in the government of the world. Though God may postpone the punishment of the wicked, he shows, in due time, that in conniving at their sins, he did not overlook or fail to perceive them; and though he exercises his own children with the cross, he proves in the issue, that he was not indifferent to their welfare. His reason for touching upon this particular point seems to be, that much darkness is thrown upon the scheme of Divine Providence by the inequality and disorder which prevail in human affairs.<sup>590</sup> We see the wicked triumphing, and applauding their own good fortune, as if there was no judge above, and taking occasion from the Divine forbearance to run into additional excesses, under the impression that they have escaped his hand. The temptation is aggravated by that stupidity and blindness of heart which lead us to imagine that God exerts no superintendence over the world, and sits idle in heaven. It is known, too, how soon we are ready to sink under the troubles of the flesh. The Psalmist, therefore, intentionally selects this as a case in which he may show the watchful care exerted by God over the human family. He begins, by using the language of exclamation, for such is the dreadful distemper and disorder by which our understandings are confounded, that we cannot comprehend the method of God's works, even when it is most apparent. We are to notice, that the inspired penman is not speaking here of the work of God in the creation of the heavens and earth,

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that country, that it was interdicted under the most severe penalties; and, in the language of the Romish Church, psalm-singing and heresy became synonymous terms. — *Warton's History of English Poetry*, volume 3, pages 164, 165.

<sup>589</sup> “Comme aussi la cause de nostre paresse brutale est, que nous avons perdu tout goust quand il est question de savourer la fin des oeuvres de Dieu.”

<sup>590</sup> “Pource que la confusion difforme laquelle se voit en la vie des hommes, obscurcit grandement l'ordre de la providence de Dieu.”

nor of his providential government of the world in general, but only of the judgments which he executes amongst men. He calls the works of God great, and his thoughts deep, because he governs the world in quite another manner than we are able to comprehend. Were things under our own management, we would entirely invert the order which God observes; and, such not being the case, we perversely expostulate with God for not hastening sooner to the help of the righteous, and to the punishment of the wicked. It strikes us as in the highest degree inconsistent with the perfections of God, that he should bear with the wicked when they rage against him, when they rush without restraint into the most daring acts of iniquity, and when they persecute at will the good and the innocent; — it seems, I say, in our eyes to be intolerable, that God should subject his own people to the injustice and violence of the wicked, while he puts no check upon abounding falsehood, deceit, rapine, bloodshed, and every species of enormity. Why does he suffer his truth to be obscured, and his holy name to be trampled under foot? This is that greatness of the Divine operation, that depth of the Divine counsel, into the admiration of which the Psalmist breaks forth. It is no doubt true, that there is an incomprehensible depth of power and wisdom which God has displayed in the fabric of the universe; but what the Psalmist has specially in view is, to administer a check to that disposition which leads us to murmur against God, when he does not pursue our plan in his providential managements. When anything in these may not agree with the general ideas of men, we ought to contemplate it with reverence, and remember that God, for the better trial of our obedience, has lifted his deep and mysterious judgments far above our conceptions.

**6** *The foolish man shall not know them.* This is added with propriety, to let us know that the fault lies with ourselves, in not praising the Divine judgments as we ought. For although the Psalmist had spoken of them as deep and mysterious, he here informs us that they would be discerned without difficulty, were it not for our stupidity and indifference. By *the foolish*, he means unbelievers in general, tacitly contrasting them with believers who are divinely enlightened by the word and Spirit. The ignorance and blindness to which he alludes have possession of all without exception, whose understandings have not been illuminated by Divine grace. It ought to be our prayer to God, that he would purge our sight, and qualify us for meditation upon his works. In short, the Psalmist vindicates the incomprehensible wisdom of God from that contempt which proud men have often cast upon it, charging them with folly and madness in acting such a part; and he would arouse us from that insensibility which is too prevalent, to a due and serious consideration of the mysterious works of God.

**7** *When the wicked flourish as the grass.* He points out, and exposes, by a striking and appropriate figure, the folly of imagining that the wicked obtain a triumph over God, when he does not, it may be, immediately bring them under restraint. He makes an admission so far — he grants that they spring up and flourish — but adds immediately, by way of qualification, that they flourish, like the grass, only for a moment, their prosperity being brief and evanescent. In this way he removes what has been almost a universal stumbling-block and ground of offense; for it would be ridiculous to envy the happiness of men who are doomed to be speedily destroyed, and of whom it may be said, that to-day they flourish, and to-morrow they are cut down and wither, (Psalm 129:6.) It will be shown, when we come to consider the psalm now quoted, that the herbs to which the wicked are compared are such as grow on the roofs of houses, which want depth of soil, and die of themselves, for lack of nourishment. In the passage now before us, the Psalmist satisfies himself with using simply the figure, that the prosperity of the wicked draws after it the speedier destruction, as the grass when it is full grown is ready for the scythe. There is an antithesis drawn, too, between the

shortness of their continuance and the everlasting destruction which awaits them; for they are not said to be cut down that they may flourish again, as withered plants will recover their vigor, but to be condemned to eternal perdition.<sup>591</sup> When he says of God, that he sits *exalted for evermore*, some understand him to mean, that God holds the power and office of governing the world, and that we may be certain nothing can happen by chance when such a righteous governor and judge administers the affairs of the world. Various other meanings have been suggested. But it seems to me that the Psalmist compares the stability of God's throne with the fluctuating and changeable character of this world, reminding us that we must not judge of Him by what we see in the world, where there is nothing of a fixed and enduring nature. God looks down undisturbed from the altitude of heaven upon all the changes of this earthly scene, which neither affect nor have any relation to him. And this the Psalmist brings forward with another view than simply to teach us to distinguish God from his creatures, and put due honor upon his majesty; he would have us learn in our contemplations upon the wonderful and mysterious providence of God, to lift our conceptions above ourselves and this world, since it is only a dark and confused view which our earthly minds can take up. It is with the purpose of leading us into a proper discovery of the Divine judgments which are not seen in the world, that the Psalmist, in making mention of the majesty of God, would remind us, that he does not work according to our ideas, but in a manner corresponding to his own eternal being. We, short-lived creatures as we are, often thwarted in our attempts, embarrassed and interrupted by many intervening difficulties, and too glad to embrace the first opportunity which offers, are accustomed to advance with precipitation; but we are taught here to lift our eyes unto that eternal and unchangeable throne on which God sits, and in wisdom defers the execution of his judgments. The words accordingly convey more than a simple commendation of the glorious being of God; they are meant to help our faith, and tell us that, although his people may sigh under many an anxious apprehension, God himself, the guardian of their safety, reigns on high, and shields them with his everlasting power.

## Psalm 92:9-11

**9.** For, lo! thine enemies, O Jehovah! for, lo, thine enemies shall perish; all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered.<sup>592</sup> **10.** But my horn shalt thou exalt, like the horn of an unicorn:<sup>593</sup> I

<sup>591</sup> “Comme s’il disoit qu’ils ne sont point retranchez, afin que sur le prim-temps ils rejettent derechef, ainsi que les herbes mortes reprent nouvelle vigueur, mais qu’ils sont condamnez a perdition eternelle. — *Fr.*”

<sup>592</sup> Hammond reads “separated,” and supposes that this may be a judicial phrase, denoting the discrimination made betwixt men, as that which will be effected betwixt the sheep and the goats at the last day. Matthew 25:32 — “All the nations shall be gathered together or assembled before him” as a judge, “and, ἀφοριεῖ αὐτοὺς ἀπ’ ἀλλήλων, he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd, ἀφορίζει, separates the sheep from the goats.” For this interpretation we have the authority of the Chaldee, which paraphrases the clause thus, “In the world to come the workers of iniquity shall be separated from the congregation of the just.” If this sense is admitted, the passage corresponds with these words in the fifth verse of the first psalm, “The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.” The LXX., however, render the original word, *yithparedu*, by διασκορπισθήσονται, “shall be scattered;” and the Syriac gives a similar version. Thus it may denote the *scattering* of enemies, which have been vanquished in battle and put to flight.

<sup>593</sup> The horn is worn over all the East, and is the symbol of strength and power. It adorns the heads of all princely personages in Oriental mythology. Large horns, representing the glory of deity, are planted on the heads of their idols, or placed in their hands. The horn is therefore frequently employed in Scripture as the emblem of power and authority; and when the Psalmist

have been profusely anointed with fresh oil.<sup>594</sup> **11.** And mine eyes shall see it on mine enemies: mine ears shall hear it upon those who rise up against me, upon those who persecute me.

**9** *For, lo! thine enemies, O Jehovah!* From what was already said in the verse preceding, the Psalmist concludes it to be impossible that God should not overthrow his enemies. This, as I have already observed, clearly shows that it was his design to establish our faith under the strong temptations to which it is subjected, and, more especially, to remove that offense out of the way, which has disturbed the minds of many, and led them astray; — we refer to the prosperity of the wicked, and its effect in attaching a certain perplexity to the judgments of God. As our faith is never called to a more sharp and arduous trial than upon this point, the Psalmist delivers the truth, which he announces with much force of expression, using both exclamations and repetition. First, he declares the destruction of God’s enemies to be as certain as if it had already taken place, and he had witnessed it with his own eyes; then he repeats his assertion: and from all this we may see how much he had benefited by glancing with the eye of faith beyond this world to the throne of God in the heavens. When staggered in our own faith at any time by the prosperity of the wicked, we should learn by his example to rise in our contemplations to a God in heaven, and the conviction will immediately follow in our minds that his enemies cannot long continue to triumph. The Psalmist tells us who they are that are God’s enemies. God hates none without a cause; nay, so far as men are the workmanship of his hand, he embraces them in his fatherly love. But as nothing is more opposed to his nature than sin, he proclaims irreconcilable war with the wicked. It contributes in no small degree to the comfort of the Lord’s people, to know that the reason why the wicked are destroyed is, their being necessarily the objects of God’s hatred, so that he can no more fail to punish them than deny himself.<sup>595</sup>

The Psalmist, shortly afterwards, shows that he intended this to be a ground of comfort and hope under all cares, griefs, anxieties, and embarrassments. He speaks under the figure of *oil* of enjoying Divine blessings, and by *green* or *fresh* oil is meant, such as has not become corrupted, or unfit for use by age. It is noticeable that he appropriates, and improves for his own individual comfort, that grace of God which is extended to all the Lord’s people without exception; and would teach us by this that mere general doctrine is a cold and unsatisfactory thing, and that each of us should improve it particularly for himself, in the persuasion of our belonging to the number of God’s children. In one word, the Psalmist promises himself the protection of God, under whatever persecutions he should endure from his enemies, whether they were secret, or more open and violent, that he may encourage himself to persevere with indefatigable spirit in the world’s conflict. We may judge from this how absurd is the opinion of the Rabbin, who conjectured that Adam was the

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affirms that God would exalt his horn, it expresses his assurance of victory over his enemies. As to the animal meant by “the unicorn,” great variety of interpretations has obtained both among ancient and modern critics. The most probable opinion is that of Bochart, who, supporting himself by numerous quotations from Arabian and other Eastern writers, concludes that the *reem*, of Scripture, is a species of wild goat of a snow-white color, having long and sharp horns, and distinguished by carrying their heads very high.

<sup>594</sup> “The verb in the Hebrew expresses much more than a superficial unction, viz., a penetration of the whole substance of the man’s person by the oil. See Parkhurst’s Lexicon, under *resh*: — *fresh oil*; rather *invigorating oil*.” — *Horsley* The original word for *fresh* signifies *green* But, as Harmer observes, “We are not to suppose the Psalmist means oil of a green color. We are to understand the word as signifying precious, fragrant oil, such as princes in times of prosperity were anointed with.” — *Harmer’s Observations*, volume 3, page 257.

<sup>595</sup> “Qu’il faut necessairement qu’ils soyent hays de Dieu, lequel ne se peut renoncer soy mesme.”

author of this psalm <sup>596</sup> — as if it were credible that his posterity should have set themselves up in rebellion against him.

### Psalm 92:12-13

**12.** The righteous shalt flourish like the palm-tree, <sup>597</sup> he shall be multiplied as the cedar in Lebanon. <sup>598</sup> **13.** Those who are planted in the house of Jehovah shall flourish in the courts of our God. **14.** They shall still bud forth in old age; they shall be fat and green; **15.** That they may show that Jehovah is upright, my rock, and that there is no iniquity in him.

**12** *The righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree.* He now passes to the consideration of another general truth, That though God may exercise his people with many trials, subject them to hardships, and visit them with privations, he will eventually show that he had not forgotten them. We need not be surprised that he insists so explicitly and carefully upon this point, as nothing is more difficult than for the saints of God to entertain expectations of being raised up and delivered when they have been reduced almost to the state of the dead, and it does not appear how they can live. Some think the cedar is mentioned from the fragrancy of its smell, and the palm for the sweetness of its fruit; but this is too subtle a meaning to attach to the words. The sense seems simply, that though the righteous may appear for a time to be withered, or to have been cut down, they will again spring up with renewed vigor, and flourish as well and as fair in the Church of God as the stateliest trees upon Lebanon. The expression which is employed — *planted in the house of the Lord* — gives the reason of their vigorous growth; nor is it meant that they have merely a place there, (which can be said even of hypocrites,) but that they are firmly fixed, and deeply rooted in it, so as to be united to God. The Psalmist speaks of *the courts* of the Lord, because none but the priests were allowed

<sup>596</sup> These Rabbins say that Adam composed it immediately after the creation before the Sabbath. The Chaldee paraphrase entitles the psalm, “A hymn or song which the first man spoke concerning the Sabbath-day.” But had it been a composition of Adam’s, one would think it should have been placed at the head of this collection of psalms. Besides, there were no musical instruments at that time for this psalm to be sung upon, (see verse 3;) for Tubal was the father of them that handle the harp and organ; nor, as Calvin observes, had Adam numerous enemies and wicked men who rose up against him, to which reference is made in verses 7, 9, 11. We may therefore justly regard the Jewish tradition, which ascribes the composition of this psalm to Adam, as fabulous, having no other foundation but the invention and fancy of some of their Rabbins.

<sup>597</sup> The palm is one of the noblest and most beautiful of trees. It is more remarkable than any other tree for its *straight, upright* growth, and hence its Hebrew name *tamar* It frequently rises to the height of more than a hundred feet; and its leaves, when it arrives at maturity, are often six or eight feet in length, and broad in proportion. At the age of thirty it attains its greatest vigor, and continues in full strength and beauty for seventy years longer, producing every year about three or four hundred weight of dates. It is crowned at the top with a large tuft of spiralling leaves about four feet long, which never fall off, but always continue in the same flourishing verdure. And it has been said that when loaded with any weight it possesses the quality of resisting it, and of rising upwards and bending the contrary way, to counterbalance the pressure. This tree, then, so distinguished for its uprightness, loftiness, fecundity, longevity, perpetual verdure, and power of resistance, is employed with great elegance to express the spiritual beauty, elevation, fruitfulness, constancy, patience, and victory of the righteous.

<sup>598</sup> The cedars of Lebanon are a favourite image with the sacred writers. They grow to a prodigious size, rise to an enormous height, and spread their branches to a great extent, affording a grateful shade. They continue to flourish for more than a thousand years; and, when cut down, their wood is so durable that it has obtained the reputation of being incorruptible. How striking, then, the image, “The righteous shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon,” like that massy, lofty, umbrageous, and incorruptible tree, which continues to flourish from generation to generation, which survives empires, and is still vigorous when a thousand years have passed over it.

to enter the holy place; the people worshipped in the court. By *those who are planted* in the Church he means such as are united to God in real and sincere attachment, and insinuates that their prosperity cannot be of a changeable and fluctuating nature, because it is not founded upon anything that is in the world. Nor indeed can we doubt that whatever has its root, and is founded in the sanctuary, must continue to flourish and partake of a life which is spiritual and everlasting. It is in this sense that he speaks of their *still budding forth*, and being *fat*, even in old age, when the natural sap and juices are generally dried up. The language amounts to saying that they are exempt from the ordinary lot of men, and have a life which is taken from under the common law of nature.<sup>599</sup> It is thus that Jacob, speaking of the great renovation which should take place in the Church, mentions, that at that happy period he who was an hundred years old should be a child, meaning that, though old age naturally tends to death, and one who has lived a hundred years is upon the very borders of it, yet in the kingdom of Christ; a man would be reckoned as being merely in his childhood, and starting in life, who entered upon a new century. This could only be verified in the sense, that after death we have another existence in heaven.

**15.** *That they may show that Jehovah is upright.* It is evident from this verse that the great object of the Psalmist is, to allay that disquietude of mind which we are apt to feel under the disorder which reigns apparently in the affairs of this world; and to make us cherish the expectation, (under all that may seem severe and trying in our lot, and though the wicked are in wealth and power, flourish, and abound in places and distinctions,) that God will bring light and order eventually out of confusion. *That they may show*, it is said particularly, *that the Lord is upright*; for through the influence of our corruption we are apt to conclude, when things do not proceed as we would wish in the world, that God is chargeable not only with neglect but with unrighteousness, in abandoning his people, and tolerating the commission of sin. When God displays his justice in proceeding to execute vengeance upon the wicked, it will be seen at once, that any prosperity which they enjoyed was but the forerunner of a worse destruction in reserve for them. The Psalmist, in calling God *his rock*, shows a second time that he reckoned himself amongst the number of those in whom God would illustrate his justice by extending towards them his protection.

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<sup>599</sup> “*They shall still bring forth fruit in old age.* Being thus planted and watered, they shall not only bring forth the fruits of righteousness, but shall continue and go on to do so, and even when they are grown old; contrary to all other trees, which, when old, cease bearing fruit; but so do not the righteous; grace is often in the greatest vigor when nature is decayed; witness Abraham, Job, David, Zechariah, and Elisabeth, and good old Simeon, who went to the grave like shocks of corn fully ripe.” — *Dr Gill*.

The translation of Psalms 67-92 is located here.

## Indexes

### Index of Scripture References

#### Genesis

1:11 1:16 1:21 4:15 4:24 6:2 8:13 10:6 11:15 11:28 13:15 14:18 15:18 17:7 18:19  
19:37 19:38 21:23 22:8 25:2 25:12-18 25:30 27:1 28:12 29:1 31:53 42:23 44:20  
45:18 49 49:3 49:10 49:21 49:22 49:24

#### Exodus

4:22 4:22 5:2 7:7 7:12 8:21 8:22 9:23 11:5 12:23 12:29 12:29 14:4 14:8 14:11  
14:11 14:12 14:24 14:30 15:2 15:16 15:20 15:20 15:24 16:1 16:10 16:12 16:13  
16:27 17 17:7 19 20:2 20:4 20:5 20:5 20:5 23:25 25:21 30:26 32:1 32:6 32:17-19  
32:22 34:6 34:6 34:7

#### Leviticus

16 16:5 16:21 16:22 23:24

#### Numbers

2 2:18-21 2:19 6:24-26 6:24-26 10:10 10:11 10:35 11:1 11:2 11:3 11:4 11:31-35  
11:33 13:22 14:1 14:22 14:23 14:27-29 14:32 16:22 17:8 18:29 20:2 20:13 21  
21:1 21:13 21:14 21:15 23:10 24:4 24:21 26:10 26:37 29:1 33:3

#### Deuteronomy

1:42 3:3 3:4 5:6 5:8 11:24 12:5 20:1 20:4 21:6 21:10 21:17 25:7 29:18 30:12  
32:3 32:13 32:14 32:17 32:27 32:29 32:33 32:33 33 34:7

#### Joshua

3:6 3:16 13:5 17:11 17:11 18:1

#### Judges

4 4 4:3 4:13 5 5:4 5:5 5:12 5:14 5:16 5:19 6 7 7:21 7:23 7:24 7:25 8:10-21  
8:19 9:48 11:34 13:6 13:22 19:10 19:20

#### Ruth

4:1 4:2

#### 1 Samuel

2:5 2:27 4:10 4:11 4:17 5:12 9:6 14:25 15:7 16:12 18:6

#### 2 Samuel

1:19 1:25 6:17 6:18 7 7:8 7:11 7:14 7:14 11:11 12:31 24

#### 1 Kings

4:20 4:21 4:31 4:31 4:31 5:18 8:27 12:2 12:25-33 14:6 18:44 19:18 20:23 22:10

#### 2 Kings

2:12 4:23 4:31 6:16 6:16 7:1-18 19 19:16 19:35 19:35 19:36 19:37 24:8 25:7

#### 1 Chronicles

1:24-27 2:6 2:6 5:10 7:20 7:21 7:22 9:19 14:11 19:10-19 25:1 25:1 26:1-19

#### 2 Chronicles



6:28 6:28 11 15 16 19:5-7 19:7 20:1 20:10 20:14 20:19 20:22 26:21 28:5 28:11  
29:30 32:21 36:22 36:23

**Esther**

2:6 2:19 9:13

**Job**

1:6 2:10 3:4 3:23 5:7 5:26 9:30 14:7 15:27 18:19 20:11 20:17 21:13 27:20 29:7  
29:12 29:16 29:17 31:13 40:21 41

**Psalms**

2:1 2:7 12:4 13:1 16:4 16:10 17:5 17:10 17:14 18:26 18:45 20:7 20:7 22:7 22:9  
22:10 22:18 22:23 22:26 26:6 27:5 29:1 29:1 29:1 29:4 30:5 31 31:1 32:3 33:12  
33:12 34:7 35:13 36:6 36:7 38 39:6 39:6 44:3 44:3 44:17 44:18 44:23 45 45:3  
45:11 48:2 50:14 57:6 58:10 59:13 67 67:1-7 68:1-6 68:7-10 68:11-14 68:15-17  
68:18-24 68:25-27 68:27 68:28-30 68:31-35 69:1-5 69:6-9 69:9 69:10-13 69:14-18  
69:19-21 69:22-29 69:30-33 69:34-36 70:1-5 71:1-4 71:5-8 71:9-13 71:11 71:14-16  
71:17-19 71:20-24 72:1-6 72:7-11 72:8 72:12-15 72:16-20 73:1-3 73:4 73:4-9 73:10-14  
73:15-17 73:16 73:17 73:18-20 73:21-24 73:25-28 74:1 74:1-8 74:2 74:9 74:9-12  
74:13-17 74:14 74:14 74:18-23 75:1-7 75:8-10 76:1-6 76:7-12 77:1-6 77:7-10 77:11-14  
77:15-20 78:1-6 78:7-11 78:12-16 78:17-22 78:23-25 78:26-31 78:32-37 78:38-41  
78:42-51 78:52-58 78:59-66 78:60 78:67 78:67 78:67-72 79 79:1-4 79:5 79:5 79:5-9  
79:10-13 80:1-3 80:4-7 80:8-13 80:14-19 81:1-3 81:8-12 81:13-16 82:1-4 82:5-8 82:6  
83:1-4 83:5-8 83:9 83:9-12 83:13-18 84:1-4 84:5-7 84:8-11 85:1-4 85:5-8 85:9-13  
85:12 86:1-7 86:8-11 86:12-17 87:1 87:1-3 87:4 87:4-6 87:7 88:1-5 88:5 88:6-9  
88:10-13 88:14-18 89:1-4 89:5-8 89:7 89:7 89:9-14 89:11 89:15-18 89:19-23 89:24-29  
89:30-37 89:37 89:38 89:38 89:38-45 89:46-48 89:49-52 90:1 90:1-2 90:3-8 90:9-10  
90:11-13 90:14-17 91:1-4 91:5-8 91:6 91:9-12 91:13-16 92:1-4 92:5-8 92:9-11 92:12-13  
96:5 99 102:28 103:13-16 103:14 105:11 105:12 105:15 105:31 105:44 107:2 110:2  
111:7 113:7 114:2 118:18 118:18 118:25 119:18 119:20 119:30 119:39 119:52 119:75  
125:2 125:2 129:6 132:11 132:14 133:3 133:3 137:5 138:8 145:19 147:14 148:7

**Proverbs**

1:9 2:17 3:26 7:22 8:15 23:31 26:2 30:25 30:26

**Ecclesiastes**

9:2 9:3 10:17

**Song of Solomon**

1:2 2:14 4:9 8:6

**Isaiah**

1:3 1:24 1:24 2:2 3:16 8:17 9:4 9:12 11:4 12:3 13:21 14:19 14:20 14:22 14:23  
14:30 14:32 14:32 17:13 19:11 19:13 20:3 20:4 21:12 23:1 25:9 26:1 26:19 27:6  
27:36 29:7 30:4 30:7 30:21 31:3 33:4 33:19 34:14 36:20 37:22 37:23 37:23 37:36  
40 40:1 40:9 41:2 41:7 43:21 44:26-28 45:1-11 51:1 51:9 51:9 52:7 52:7 54:1  
55:4 55:6 57:14 58:6 58:6 59:6 59:14 59:17 59:21 60:4 62:10 65:6 65:24 330:4

**Jeremiah**

7:12 8:2 9:15 10:25 12 12:1 14:22 22:19 22:23 25:12 25:13 31:31-34 32:18 33:2  
36:30 48:28 50:39

**Lamentations**

3:1

**Ezekiel**7:22 12:6 13:9 16:32 17:2 18:32 19:10 19:12 19:13 21:21 21:22 21:27 24:24 24:27  
27:9 29:3 29:3 29:5 32:2 32:2 33:31**Daniel**

3:15 5:1 5:30 11:38 12:2

**Hosea**

2:23 7:16 7:16 10:4 13:11 45:3

**Joel**

1:4 1:4 2:25

**Amos**

3:8 6:6 6:12 6:13 9:2

**Obadiah**

1:4

**Micah**

4:1 4:3

**Nahum**

1:8 2:7

**Habakkuk**

1:11 2:1 2:1 3:2 3:3

**Haggai**

1:10 1:11 2:9 2:17-19

**Zechariah**

2:8

**Malachi**

4:2

**Matthew**

4:6 13:35 13:54 13:56 16:6 25:32 27:34 27:48 28:18

**Mark**

1:35

**Luke**

2:34 4:10 4:11 6:38 9:55 9:55 13:11 13:12 13:16 23:31

**John**1:47 1:51 2:17 2:17 7:15 10:18 10:34 10:34 10:35 15:25 17:3 19:28 19:28-30  
19:29 19:29**Acts**

1:16 1:20 15:21

**Romans**1:17 2:16 4:14 8:26 8:30 8:31 8:39 9:17 9:23 10:14 10:14 11:9 11:9 11:10 11:33  
13:1 15:3 15:3 15:5 15:6 15:9**1 Corinthians**

4:5 5:8 7:31 10:2 10:3 11:33 13:1 14:13

**2 Corinthians**

3:18

**Galatians**

3:16 4:19

**Ephesians**

1:4 1:10 4:8 4:8 4:8 4:9 4:10 6:16

**Philippians**

4:7

**Colossians**

1:15 3:3

**1 Thessalonians**

4:3 4:3 4:4 4:4 4:7 4:7

**2 Thessalonians**

1:6 1:7

**1 Timothy**

2:2 3:15 4:8 6:16

**2 Timothy**

3:7

**Hebrews**

1:3 1:5 9:22 12:6 12:6

**James**

4:6

**1 Peter**

4:17 4:17 5:8

**2 Peter**

3:4 3:8

**1 John**

2:19

**Jude**

1:14

**Revelation**

12:9 22:11

**Tobit**

1:18

**Wisdom of Solomon**

16:14

**1 Maccabees**

1:47

**Index of Scripture Commentary**

**Psalms**

67:1 67:2 67:3 67:6 68:1 68:3 68:4 68:7 68:9 68:11 68:13 68:14 68:15 68:16  
68:17 68:18 68:19 68:21 68:22 68:24 68:25 68:28 68:30 68:31 68:32 68:34 69:1  
69:2 69:3 69:4 69:5 69:6 69:7 69:9 69:10 69:12 69:13 69:14 69:16 69:18 69:19  
69:20 69:21 69:22 69:23 69:24 69:25 69:26 69:27 69:28 69:29 69:30 69:31 69:32  
69:34 69:36 71:1 71:4 71:5 71:6 71:7 71:9 71:10 71:12 71:13 71:14 71:15 71:16  
71:17 71:19 71:20 71:22 71:23 72:1 72:2 72:4 72:5 72:6 72:7 72:8 72:10 72:11  
72:12 72:15 72:16 72:17 72:18 72:20 73:1 73:2 73:3 73:4 73:5 73:6 73:7 73:8  
73:9 73:10 73:11 73:12 73:15 73:16 73:17 73:18 73:19 73:20 73:21 73:22 73:23  
73:24 73:25 73:26 73:27 73:28 74:1 74:2 74:3 74:4 74:5 74:7 74:8 74:9 74:10  
74:11 74:12 74:13 74:16 74:17 74:18 74:19 74:20 74:21 74:22 75:1 75:2 75:3  
75:4 75:6 75:8 75:9 76:1 76:2 76:3 76:4 76:5 76:7 76:8 76:9 76:10 76:11 76:12  
77:1 77:2 77:3 77:4 77:5 77:6 77:7 77:9 77:10 77:11 77:13 77:14 77:15 77:16  
77:17 77:19 78:1 78:3 78:4 78:5 78:6 78:7 78:8 78:9 78:10 78:11 78:12 78:15  
78:17 78:18 78:19 78:21 78:23 78:26 78:30 78:32 78:33 78:34 78:36 78:38 78:39  
78:40 78:42 78:44 78:50 78:52 78:53 78:55 78:56 78:58 78:59 78:60 78:61 78:62  
78:65 78:67 78:68 78:69 78:70 78:71 79:1 79:4 79:5 79:6 79:8 79:9 79:10 79:11  
79:12 79:13 80:1 80:3 80:4 80:5 80:8 80:12 80:14 80:15 80:16 80:17 80:18 81:1  
81:4 81:5 81:6 81:7 81:8 81:9 81:10 81:11 81:13 81:14 81:15 82:1 82:2 82:3  
82:5 82:6 82:8 83:1 83:2 83:4 83:5 83:9 83:12 83:13 83:18 84:1 84:2 84:3 84:4  
84:5 84:6 84:7 84:8 84:10 84:11 85:1 85:2 85:4 85:5 85:6 85:7 85:8 85:9 85:10  
85:12 85:13 86:1 86:2 86:3 86:5 86:6 86:8 86:9 86:10 86:11 86:12 86:13 86:14  
86:15 86:16 86:17 87:1 87:2 87:3 87:4 87:5 87:6 87:7 88:1 88:3 88:5 88:6 88:7  
88:8 88:9 88:10 88:11 88:14 88:15 89:1 89:2 89:3 89:5 89:6 89:7 89:9 89:11  
89:14 89:15 89:17 89:18 89:19 89:20 89:22 89:24 89:25 89:26 89:28 89:30 89:34  
89:35 89:36 89:38 89:40 89:42 89:45 89:46 89:47 89:48 89:49 89:50 89:51 89:52  
90:1 90:2 90:3 90:5 90:7 90:8 90:9 90:10 90:11 90:12 90:13 90:16 91:1 91:2  
91:3 91:4 91:5 91:7 91:9 91:11 91:12 91:13 91:14 91:15 92:1 92:4 92:5 92:6  
92:7 92:9 92:12 92:15

## Index of Greek Words and Phrases

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- Τὸ ἄνω & ἡ ἀρχὴ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς γῆς ἐστὶν ἡ ἀρχὴ τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τῆς ἀνθρώπων ἡγεμονίας.”
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## Index of Latin Words and Phrases

- Ab affectu ipso
- Ab effecto ipso
- Acsi ex conceptis pacti verbis cum eo ageret
- Ad generum Cereris sine caede et sanguine pauci, Descendunt reges, et sicca morte tyranni
- Atqui proterva haec eorum insultatio
- Aut invenit viam
- Bibentes
- Caput tamen unum efficere
- Contusus miseria,' scilicet
- Cum autem semel gladium scelere imbuisset
- Dei benedictiones quae ad hanc caducam vitam spectant, non esse perpetuas, neque aequali tenore fluere
- Dicit [vates scil.] quod Deus disperdit nationes, quae volunt malum inferre Israeli, et coetum taurorum, seu reges illustriores, ut reges Assyriae et Babylonis, quorum quisque conculcat frusta argentea; i
- Ecquid habet acetum in pectore
- Et dabit ei de auro Seba: et orabit pro eo semper, quotidie benedicit eum
- Et posteriora ejus in pallore auri
- Ex tristi ruinae spectaculo
- Expertes
- Fasces
- Filiabitur nomen ejus
- Fontem ponent
- Globum
- In virga
- Manus mea nocte extenditur, et non quiescit
- Maximum proventum vites tribuunt, quae nulla jutae cultura palmites per summa spargunt fastigia arborum
- Mea uxor tota in fermento jacet
- Mortui, qui vivere desierunt, manes, proprie flaccidi
- Mortuus est Haran
- Nec Saturnius haec oculis pater adspicit aequis
- Nemo antea relegavit
- Operti fuerunt montes umbra ejus
- Physica Sacra

- Praefracte
- Praeparate viam
- Quia illis ad manum est deprecatio
- Quia non est respectus morti eorum
- Quum ultimus esset in rustico tugurio, et inter pecuarios
- Regum timendorum in proprios greges, Reges in ipsos imperium est Jovis, Clari giganteo triumpho, Cuncta supercilio moventis
- Sauciorum tuorum numerum adaugentes
- Securis
- Sed quasi fumo hebetari nostros oculos; falli etiam nos in ipsa duritie, quia non reputamus solo Dei conspectu liquefieri montes ipsos
- Si Dii habitum corporis tui aviditati animi parem esse voluissent, orbis te non caperet; altera manu orientem, altera occidentem contingeres
- Sicuti nugantur Sophistae
- Sobolescet nomen ejus
- Sollicitor nullos esse putare deos
- Stulta aemulatione decepti
- Super occasum
- Unusquisque
- Usque in excelsum
- Vindemiabit
- acutum est
- ad abundantiam
- ad opimitates
- agmen
- ascendenti per deserta
- augescere
- auroram
- bruchus
- calcantem frustra argenti
- cibus nobilium, scilicet principum; hoc est, cibus exquisitus, delicatus, eximius
- colligationes
- consumptus est
- coram facie
- coram te
- diffusio
- divisit
- et firma sunt vestibula eorum
- et scopebam spiritum meum
- existet nomen ejus
- exitus mortus
- expandit
- falius
- generatio generationum



- in ipso articulo
- in purpura sua
- inter medios terminos
- laudatae
- litteraturam
- loca omnibus affluentia proprie abundantiae
- moros
- multa annorum millia
- multitudinem frumenti
- non hominis sed draconis
- novilunium
- orcus, abaddon
- pavimentum argento tessellatum
- perseverabit
- perseverabit nomen ejus
- plantam
- praeparatum est
- pro
- proeones
- putidum et aliunde conquisitum
- q
- scelere imbuere
- scopabo eam in scopa terens
- scopebam
- sobolem procreare
- stabilietur
- sycos
- termini
- verto plantam
- viresque acquireret eundo
- virtute multa
- Ægypte Capta
- Ætas parentum, pejor avis, tulit Nos nequiores, mox daturos Progeniem vitiosiorum

### **Index of French Words and Phrases**

- (Car c'est un verbe en la langue Hebraique qui vient du nom de Fils,) c'est a dire, sera perpetue de pere en fils
- A fin que par la clarte d'icelle les Gentils soyent amenez a la participation de la mesme esperance
- A la verite une telle stupidite estoit plus que brutale, ou plustost comme une chose monstrueuse

- Afin que les fideles en chantant Pseaumes et Cantiques monstrent la souvenance qu'ils ont des benefices receus, et luy en facent recognoissance
- Ailleurs
- Ascavoir, en te delaissant
- Avec ma
- Aye considere
- Car David appelant yci ceux qui devoient faire le plus grand devoir et estre les premiers a annoncer les louanges de Dieu, n'eust pas fait mention de ceste acte qui estoit ignominieux, et tendoit grandement a leur deshonneur
- Car ce n'est pas que les fideles se veuillent yci souler a veoir espandre le sang humain
- Car ceste est la vraye cognoissance, laquelle nous pouvons bailler aux autres de main en main, quand nous mettons en avant ce que Dieu nous a revele, non point des levres taut seulement: mais aussi du profond du coeur
- Car comme les Latins et aussi les Grecs, quand ils descrivent la contenance des gens enyvrez d'orgueil, ont des verbes qui signifient Regarder en bas, d'autant que telles gens ne daignent pas regarder droit les personnes
- Car ils ont en main la priere et recognoissance de leur faute
- Car selon que nos pensees sont volages, si elles sont distraittes ca et la, elles s'alienent facilement de Dieu
- Ce point de doctrine, lequel ils avoyent fait mine de tenir bien resoluement
- Ceux qui estans descendus d'Abraham n'ensuyvoyent point sa saintete
- Comme aussi la cause de nostre paresse brutale est, que nous avons perdu tout goust quand il est question dee savourer la fin des oeuvres
- Comme estort le pavillon de l'Arche
- Comme gazouillent ces brouillons et Sophistes de Sorbonistes
- Comme junchez en lieux glissans
- Comme le principal instrument d'icelle, et par maniere de dire, le chariot auquel elle est apportee, quand elle se vient monstrier aux hommes
- Comme les pluyes drues et longues
- Comme nous en voyons plusieurs qui donnans du pied au fond, de roideur trouvent facon d'eschapper le peril de l'eau: mais depuis qu'on se trouve une fois enfonce en quelque borbier ou riviere limonneuse, c'est fait, il n'y a nul moyen de se sauver
- Comme si c'estoit un enfer plus haut, et qu'il y en eust un autre plus bas
- Comme souvent il en prendra aux fideles
- Comme s'il disoit qu'ils ne sont point retranchez, afin que sur le prim-temps ils rejettent derechef, ainsi que les herbes mortes reprenent nouvelle vigueur, mais qu'ils sont condamnez a perdition eternelle
- Comme s'il luy presentoit requeste suyvant les propres mots et articles expres de son alliance
- C'est a dire, de la puissance de Dieu
- C'est a dire, de son temps
- C'est a dire, la declaration de la volonte de Dieu
- C'est a dire, sans determiner personne
- C'est a dire, sans determiner quelque certaine personne
- C'est a dire, souffle

- C'est, Qui est Jah, ou l'Eternel
- C'est, car
- C'est, du Midi
- C'est, faites justice
- C'est, gouverne le monde
- C'est, ire
- C'est, je remettray les choses en leur estat
- C'est, la mort
- C'est, le plus grand monstre marin qui soit
- C'est, les condamnez a mort
- C'est, l'elite et la fleur du peuple
- C'est, ma maladie
- C'est, on luy donnera, etc., on priera, etc., on benira
- C'est, outre toy
- C'est, par ta volonte et liberalite
- C'est, se cachent
- C'est, te rendrons graces
- De la revelation faite a Samuel
- De la verite et fidelite des promesses, et de la foy qu'on y doit adjouster
- De nostre tardivete et nonchalance a profiter en la doctrine
- Des le ventre de ma mere
- Dont
- D'autant que toute la vraye sagesse qui doit estre ainsi nommee es hommes, consiste en un seul point
- En la presence de Dieu
- En sorte qu'ils ne retourneront jamais, a bon sens, et celui qui est ord, deviendra encore plus ord
- En un lieu de plaisance, et comme pour avoir leur nid a part
- Entant que leur cupidite et ambition insatiable ne pent estre retenue par quelque separation qu'il y ait, mais tasche tousjours d'enjamber par dessus
- Est eslevee jusques en haut
- Et bien equippez de toutes choses requises a la guerre
- Et est pour monstrier que le secours que Dieu donne aux siens, procede de sa bonte gratuite
- Et laquelle
- Et lave mes mains en nettete
- Et les discours qui regnent communeement en leur cerveaux
- Et pesche pour eux
- Et pourtant il nous y faut aviser de plus pres
- Et se retrancher du tout
- Et suyvre a leur train
- Et to retournant, estant appaise
- Et toutesfois
- Exposans que les meschans amolissent, c'est a dire, rendent lasches les autres, c'est a dire, les espouantent et intimident
- Font toutesfois un chef comme les autres lignedes

- Gardons-nous de penser qu'ils soyent eschappez, ou que Dieu leur favorise
- Gros asniers
- Il dit que les fideles y viendront a grand foule, et a l'envie l'un de l'autre, comme on dit
- Il est advenu desja de pieca
- Il semble qu'ils ont bon marche de se mocquer de luy, et qu'il n'en sera autre chose
- Il tesmoigne derechef qu'il estime plus de jouyer de ceste liberte d'assister avec les autres au tabernacle de Dieu, quand mesme il ne devoit vivre qu'un jour, etc
- Ils sentiront a la fin a leur grande honte, qu'ils estoient desnuer de toute vertu
- La grace de Dieu plus grande qu'on n'eust ose esperer
- La montagne des hauteurs
- La rendent semblable
- La stupidite brutale
- Laquelle apparoist quand il fait la vengeance des outrages qu'on a faits aux siens
- Laquelle est le fondement et le comble de sagesse
- Les autres ont traduit les verbes par un temps passe, Il a commande aux nuees, Il a ouvert les portes du ciel, Il a fait pluvoir la Manne
- Les gens stupides prenent cela comme s'il s'arrestoit ainsi qu'un homme estonne, qui ne scait par ou commencer
- Lesquels surmontoient de beaucoup toute la gloire, toutes les richesses et magnificences et les precieux ornemens du monde
- L'ennemi n'aura puissance sur luy
- Mais au contraire que par dessus tous empeschemens ils poursuyvront constamment a chercher Dieu, et par maniere de dire, se feront voye la ou il n'y en a point
- Mais cest enrage desdain et outrage
- Mais du travail qu'il avoit prins a la provigner
- Mais estant conduit par le Sainct Esprit, il n'a point passe outre les limites
- Mais j'affermiray
- Mais pource que c'estoit un rudiment fort utile au peuple ancien
- Mais qu'il y a comme une fumees qu'il nous esblouist les yeux; semblablement que nous nous abusons quant a leur durete et obstination; pource que nous ne venons point a considerer qu'au seul regard de Dieu les montagnes mesmes fondent et s'ecoulent
- Mettans en avant l'absurdite qui en reviendroit, si Dieu ne punissoit les persecuteurs
- Ne faire qu'il ne fust enclin et pitie envers les enfans d'Abraham pour exaucer leurs prieres
- Ne sont pas perpetuelles, et ne descoulent pas d'un fil continuel
- Neantmoins il faut imputer cela a la malice de ceux qui ayans veu la chose eux-mesmes de leurs yeux, ont mieux aime s'esblouir la veue et desguiser le fait, que d'en entretenir la pure cognoissance
- N'ont peu trouver leurs mains
- On scait assez par les histoires le brocard duquel usa anciennement un tyran de Sicile nomme Denis le jeune, quand apres avoir pille le temple de Syracuses, il se mit sur la mer, et veit qu'il avoit fort bon vent pour naviger
- Ont rugi comme lions

- Or est-il, que depuis ce temps-la, il ne perdit jamais la liberte de pouvoir comparoistre devant l'Arche avec les autres, si non une fois et pour bien peu de temps, c'est ascavoir quand il s'enfuit pour la persecution que luy faisoit son fils
- Ou la cloche sonnera pour appeler les gens aux prieres publiques
- Ou, Convenances
- Ou, J'ay transgresse contre la generation de tes enfans
- Ou, a cause de la frayeur
- Ou, a leur cupidite
- Ou, a plusieurs
- Ou, as quitte l'alliance de ton serviteur
- Ou, assemble la congregation
- Ou, changemens
- Ou, de troupe en troupe
- Ou, du meurier
- Ou, elle fust blanche
- Ou, establi
- Ou, fortifiez
- Ou, il jugeras au milieu les dieux
- Ou, la force et le fil
- Ou, le Leban
- Ou, ma doctrine
- Ou, perversite, ou, durete
- Ou, possedee
- Ou, pour Solomon
- Ou, rouge
- Ou, sera-il eslongne
- Ou, si est ce que
- Ou, tout le jour
- Ou, une parolle
- Par
- Par lesqnels moyens ils ont pensé se racheter pour eschapper la main et vengeance de Dieu
- Par l'effet mesme
- Parquoy c'a este une vertu a David plus qu'humaine
- Plustost il signifie yci un siecle
- Pour faire
- Pour faire la fin de ce livre troisieme
- Pource que la confusion difforme laquelle se voit en la vie des hommes, obscurcit grandement l'ordre de la providence de Dieu
- Pource que nostre vie
- Pource qu'il ne leur semble point avis qu'ils ayent rien de commun avec les autres hommes, mais pensent estre quelque chose a part, et comme des petis dieux
- Pource qu'ils n'ont rien au dedans qui leur acquiere autorite et donne majeste
- Pource qu'on luy defend de se trouver en public et que chacun la repousse

- Pourveu que nous laissons la providence de Dieu tenir sa procedure par les degrez, qu'il a determinez en son conseil secret
- Premierement il faut que nous ostions toute obstination, avant que nous puissions avoir les cols propres pour recevoir son joug
- Quand Dieu fait que de la roche saillit un cours d'eau pour la necessite du peuple
- Quand j'auray prins assignation
- Que comme les neiges font blanchir ceste montagne, laquelle de soy est obscure et noire, ainsi quand il a pleu a Dieu d'oster l'obscurite qu'apportoit l'affliction des ennemis, lors on a veu la terre reluire d'un lustre naif, et par maniere de dire, porter une face joyeuse
- Que c'en a este fait en un moment, ainsi que le feu a incontinent consume de la paille ou des feuilles d'arbres bieu seiches
- Que des le ventre de sa mere il est serviteur domestique de Dieu, et comme nay d'un sien serviteur en la maison
- Que le monde tourne a l'aventure, et (comme on dit) est gouverne par fortune
- Que leur vie a este emportee comme quand en tumulte on ravit quelque chose
- Que si nous commencons au matin de louer Dieu, il faut continuer ses louanges jusques a la derniere partie de la nuit; pource que sa bonte et fidelite meritent cela
- Que tout vient a l'aventure
- Qui convertissent en diffame et blasme le desir que les fideles ont de sa gloire
- Qu'a cause de l'infirmité du temps, (ascavoir avant la manifestation de Christ)
- Qu'il faut necessairement qu'ils soyent hays de Dieu, lequel ne se peut renoncer soy mesme
- Qu'il y avoit un service divine special et different de ce qui se faisoit ailleurs
- Qu'ils n'ont point reprime leur insolence et appetit desordonne
- Qu'ils prenent plaisir a contempler leur puissance et grandeur, et sy mirent, comme qui voudroit se pourmener a loisir sur la glace
- Qu'ils sont alienez et bannis de la presence de Dieu
- Regnoit en grand triomphe, comme la balene se pourmene a sou aise au milieu de ce grande amas d'eaux
- Rendez vos voeus
- Rigoureusement et outrageusement
- Sans en monstrent les fruicts en leur vie
- Sans qu'il y en ait aucune autre cause
- Se abusans par leur folie a porter envie aux meschans, et les vouloir ensuyvre
- Si d'un grand coeur il ne se presentoit pour les punir et en faire la vengeance, et s'opposoit pour defendre ceux qu'on oppresse
- Si tost que nous oyons le vent de quelque esmotion
- Sur les asnes et chevaux, et autres bestes brutes
- S'il eust eu un entendement rassis et bien dispose a escouter
- Te craindra
- Tous ceux qui seront oppressez a tort
- Tous les humbles
- Une boule
- Veu que luy qui estoit homme innocent, voire qui s'estoit efforce de tout son pouvoir a leur faire plaisir

- Veu qu'il estoit le plus petit en la maison de son pere, et qu'en ce mesnage de village il estoit de ceux qui gardoyent les bestes
- Voyant ce commencement pitoyable d'une ruine
- beaucoup de milliers de jours
- semee
- si non toy
- treshaute