

we are unable to testify to thy faithfulness. *Selah.* Here we rest again, and proceed to further pleadings.

49. We may remind the Lord of his former love to his church, his former favor to ourselves. Then may we plead his oath, and beg him to remember that he has sworn to bless his chosen; and we may wrestle hard also, by urging upon him his own character, and laying hold upon his inviolable truth.

50. **Remember, Lord, the reproach of thy servants.** By their great troubles they were made a mock of by ungodly people, and hence the Lord's pity is intreated. **How I do bear in my bosom the reproach of all the mighty people.** The psalmist felt as if all the reproaches which vexed his nation were centered in himself; reproach upon the saints and their cause ought to burden us. Our part at the griefs of the Lord's people may be pleaded in prayer.

There is one interpretation of this verse which must not be passed over; the original is, "Remember my bearing in my bosom all the many nations," and this may be understood as a pleading of the church that the Lord would remember her because she was yet to be the mother of many nations, according to the prophecy of Psalm 77. She was as it were ready to give birth to nations, but how could they be born if she herself died in the meanwhile? The church is the hope of the world; should she expire, the nations would never come to the birth of regeneration.

51. **Wherewith thine enemies have reproached, O Lord.** Here is another forcible point; the scoffers are the Lord's enemies as well as ours, and their reproach falls upon him as well as upon us. **Wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of thine anointed.** Not only watching his words and actions, but even his harmless steps. Neither Christ nor his church can please the world, whichever way we turn scoffers will rail. Does this verse refer to the delays of the Messiah, those long-expected footfalls which as yet are unheard?

52. **Blessed be the Lord for evermore.** He ends where he began. Let us bless God before we pray, and while we pray, and when we have done praying, for he always deserves it of us. If we cannot understand him, we will not distrust him. When his ways are beyond our judgment we will not be so foolish as to judge; yet we shall do so if we consider his dealings to be unkind or unfaithful. He is, he must be, he shall be forever our blessed God. *Amen, and Amen.* So be it, Lord; we wish it over and over again. Be thou blessed evermore.

Psalm 90

1. *Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. We must consider the whole psalm as written for the tribes in the desert, and then we shall see the primary meaning of each verse. Moses, in effect, says - wanderers though we be in the howling wilderness, yet we find a home in thee, even as our*

forefathers did when they came out of Ur and dwelt in tents among the Canaanites. To the saints the Lord Jehovah, the self-existent God, stands instead of mansion: he shelters, comforts, protects, preserves, and cherishes all his own. It is wise to draw from the Lord's eternal condescensions reasons for expecting present and future mercies, as the psalmist did in the next psalm wherein he describes the safety of those who dwell in God.

2. **Before the mountains were brought forth.** Mountains to him are young things whose birth was but yesterday. **Or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world.** Earth was born but the other day, and her solid land was delivered from the Flood but a short while ago. **Even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God,** or, "thou art, O God." God was, when nothing else was. He was God when the earth was not a world but a chaos. If God himself were of yesterday, he would not be a suitable refuge for mortals. The eternal existence of God is here mentioned to set forth, by contrast, the brevity of human life.

3. **Thou hast turned man to destruction,** or, "to dust." The human body is resolved into its elements, as though it had been ground to powder. **And sayest, Return, ye children of men,** that is, return to the dust out of which you were taken. Human frailty is thus forcibly set forth; God creates us out of the dust, and back to the dust we go at the word of our Creator. Observe how the action of God is recognized: man is not said to die because of the decree of fate, or the action of inevitable law, but the Lord is made the agent of all.

4. **For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past.** A thousand years! How much may be crowded into it - the rise and fall of empires, the glory and obliteration of dynasties, countless events, all important to household and individual. Yet this period is to the Lord as nothing. In comparison with eternity, the most lengthened reaches of time are mere points; there is, in fact, no possible comparison between them. **And as a watch in the night,** a time which is no sooner come than gone.

5. **Thou carriest them away as with a flood.** As when a torrent bears all before it, so does the Lord bear away by death the succeeding generations. **They are as a sleep.** Not only are our plans like a sleep, but we ourselves are such. **In the morning they are like grass which groweth up.** As grass is green in the morning and hay at night, so people are changed from health to corruption in a few hours.

6. **In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up.** The grass has a golden hour, as man in his youth has a heyday of flowery glory. **In the evening it is cut down, and withereth.** Natural decay would put an end both to us and the grass; few, however, experience the full result of age, for death comes with his scythe.

7. This mortality is not accidental, neither was it inevitable in the original of our nature, but sin has provoked the Lord to anger, and therefore thus we die. **For we are consumed by thine anger.** This is the scythe which mows and the scorching heat which withers. This was specially the case in reference to the people in the wilderness. As well might grass grow in an oven as people

flourish when the Lord is angry with them. **And by thy wrath are we troubled,** or terror-stricken. A sense of divine anger confounded them, so that they lived as people who knew that they were doomed. This is true of us in a measure, but not altogether, for now that immortality and life are brought to us by the Gospel, death has changed its aspect, and, to believers in Jesus, it is no more a judicial execution. Anger and wrath are the sting of death, and in those believers have no share; love and mercy now conduct us to glory by way of the tomb. It is not seemly to read these words at a Christian's funeral without words of explanation, and a distinct endeavor to show how little they belong to believers in Jesus. To apply an ode written by the leader of the legal dispensation under circumstances of particular judgment, in reference to a people under penal censure, to those who fall asleep in Jesus seems to be the height of blundering. We may learn much from it, but we ought not to misapply it by taking to ourselves, as the beloved of the Lord, that which was chiefly true of those to whom God had sworn in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest. When, however, a soul is under conviction of sin, the language of this psalm is highly appropriate to his case, and will naturally suggest itself to the distracted mind. No fire consumes like God's anger, and no anguish so troubles the heart as his wrath.

8. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee. Sin seen by God must work death; it is only by the covering blood of atonement that life comes to any of us. When God was overthrowing the tribes in the wilderness he had their iniquities before him, and therefore dealt with them in severity. He could not have their iniquities before him and not smite them. **Our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.** There are no secrets before God. If by his countenance is here meant his love and favor, it is not possible for the heinousness of sin to be more clearly manifested than when it is seen to involve ingratitude to one so infinitely good and kind. Rebellion in the light of justice is black, but in the light of love it is devilish. How can we grieve so good a God? The children of Israel had been brought out of Egypt with a high hand, fed in the wilderness with a liberal hand, and guided with a tender hand, and their sins were especially atrocious. We, too, having been redeemed by the blood of Jesus, and saved by abounding grace, will be verily guilty if we forsake the Lord. What manner of persons ought we to be? How ought we to pray for cleansing from secret faults?

It is to us a wellspring of delights to remember that our sins, as believers, are now cast behind the Lord's back, and will never be brought to light again: therefore we live, because, the guilt being removed, the death-penalty is removed also.

9. For all our days are passed away in thy wrath. Justice shortened the days of rebellious Israel; each halting place became a graveyard; they marked their march by the tombs they left behind them. Because of the penal sentence their

days were dried up, and their lives wasted away. **We spend our years as a tale that is told.** Not their days only, but their years flew by them, rapid and idle as a gossip's story. Sin had cast a shadow over all things, and made the lives of the dying wanderers both vain and brief. The first sentence is not intended for believers to quote, as though it applied to themselves, for our days are all passed amid the lovingkindness of the Lord. Neither is the life of gracious people unsubstantial as a story-teller's tale; they live in Jesus, they have the divine Spirit within them; the simile only holds good if we consider that our lives are illustrations of heavenly goodness, parables of divine wisdom. Happy are we whose lives are such tales.

10. The days of our years are threescore years and ten. It is nothing when contrasted with eternity. Yet is life long enough for virtue and piety, and all too long for vice and blasphemy. Moses here in the original writes in a disconnected manner, as if he would set forth the utter insignificance of hurried human existence. His words may be rendered, "The days of our years! In them seventy years"; as much as to say, "The days of our years? What about them? Are they worth mentioning? The account is utterly insignificant; their full tale is but seventy." **And if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow.** The strength of old age, its very prime and pride, is a weariness and sorrow; what must its weakness be? Yet mellowed by hallowed experience, and solaced by immortal hopes, the latter days of aged Christians are not so much to be pitied as envied. The mortal fades to make room for the immortal; the old man falls asleep to wake up in the region of perennial youth. **For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.** The chain is snapped, and the eagle mounts to its native air above the clouds. Moses mourned for people as he thus sang; and well he might, as all his comrades fell at his side. His words are more nearly rendered, "He drives us fast and we fly away." As the quails were blown along by the strong west wind, so are people hurried before the tempests of death. To us, however, as believers, the winds are favorable. Who wishes it otherwise? Wherefore should we linger here? What has this poor world to offer us that we should tarry on its shores? This is not our rest. Let the Lord's winds drive fast if so he ordains, for they waft us the more swiftly to himself.

11. Who knoweth thine anger? Moses saw people dying all around him: he lived among funerals, and was overwhelmed at the terrible results of the divine displeasure. He felt that none could measure the might of the Lord's wrath. **Even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.** Good people dread that wrath beyond conception, but they never ascribe too much terror to it: bad people are dreadfully convulsed when they awake to a sense of it, for it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God. Who is able to stand against this justly angry God? Be it ours to submit ourselves as dying sinners to this eternal God, who can, even at this moment, command us to the dust, and thence to hell.

12. **So teach us to number our days.** Instruct us to set store by time, mourning for that time past wherein we have wrought the will of the flesh, using diligently the time present, which is the accepted hour and the day of salvation, and reckoning the time which lies in the future to be too uncertain to allow us safely to delay any gracious work or prayer. **That we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.** People are led by reflections upon the brevity of time to give their earnest attention to eternal things; they become humble as they look into the grave. But this is only the case when the Lord himself is the teacher; he alone can teach to real and lasting profit. We have not enough time at our disposal to justify us in mispending a single quarter of an hour. Neither are we sure of enough of life to justify us in procrastinating for a moment.

13. **Return, O Lord, how long?** Come in mercy to us again. Do not leave us to perish. As sin drives God from us, so repentance cries to the Lord to return to us. When people are under chastisement they are allowed to expostulate, and ask, **how long?** Our fault in these times is not too great boldness with God, but too much backwardness in pleading with him. **And let it repent thee concerning thy servants.** They had rebelled, but they had not utterly forsaken the Lord; they owned their obligations to obey his will, and pleaded them as a reason for pity. Will a man not spare his own servants? Though God smote Israel, yet they were his people, and he had never disowned them; therefore is he interested to deal favorably with them.

14. **O satisfy us with thy mercy.** He who has but the heart to pray need never be without pleas in prayer. The only satisfying food for the Lord's people is the favor of God. Our day is short, and the night hastens on. O give us in the early morning of our days to be satisfied with thy favor, that all through our little day we may be happy. **That we may rejoice and be glad all our days.** Being filled with divine love, their brief life on earth would become a joyful festival, and would continue so as long as it lasted. When the Lord refreshes us with his presence, our joy is such that no one can take it from us. Apprehensions of speedy death are not able to distress those who enjoy the present favor of God; though they know that the night is coming they see nothing to fear in it.

15. None can gladden the heart as thou canst, O Lord; therefore as thou hast made us sad be pleased to make us glad. The prayer is original, childlike, and full of meaning; it is moreover based upon a great principle in providential goodness, by which the Lord puts the good over against the evil. Great trials enable us to bear great joy, and may be regarded as the herald of extraordinary grace. Small lives are small throughout; and great histories are great both in sorrow and happiness. Where there are high hills there are also deep valleys. If we have fierce afflictions we may look for overflowing delights, and our faith may boldly ask for them. God who is great in justice when he chastens will not be little in mercy when he blesses; he will be great all through. Let us appeal to him with unstaggering faith.

16. **Let thy work appear unto thy servants.** See how he dwells upon that word *servants*. It is as far as the law can do, and Moses goes to the full length permitted him; henceforth Jesus calls us not servants but friends, and if we are wise we shall make full use of our wider liberty. Moses asks for displays of divine power and providence conspicuously wrought, that all the people might be cheered thereby. **And thy glory unto their children.** While their sons were growing up around them, they desired to see some outshinings of the promised glory gleaming upon them. We are content with the work if our children may but see the glory which will result from it: we sow joyfully if they may reap.

17. **And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.** Even upon us who must not see thy glory in the land of Canaan; it will suffice us if in our characters the holiness of God is reflected, and if over all our camp the lovely excellencies of our God cast a sacred beauty. Sanctification should be the daily object of our petitions. **And establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.** Let what we do be done in truth, and last when we are in the grave; may the work of the present generation minister permanently to the building up of the nation. We come and go, but the Lord's work abides. We are content to die, so long as Jesus lives and his kingdom grows.

Psalm 91

1. **He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High.** The blessings here promised are not for all believers, but for those who live in close fellowship with God. Every child of God looks towards the inner sanctuary and the mercy-seat, yet all do not dwell in the most holy place; they run to it at times, and enjoy occasional approaches, but they do not habitually reside in the mysterious presence. Those who through rich grace obtain unusual and continuous communion with God, so as to abide in Christ and Christ in them, become possessors of rare and special benefits, which are missed by those who follow afar off, and grieve the Holy Spirit of God. Into the secret place those only come who know the love of God in Christ Jesus, and those only dwell there to whom to live is Christ. To them the veil is rent, and the awful glory of the Most High is apparent: these, like Simeon, have the Holy Spirit upon them, and like Anna they depart not from the temple; of them it is truly said that their conversation is in heaven. Special grace like theirs brings with it special immunity. Outer court worshipers little know what belongs to the inner sanctuary, or surely they would press on until the place of nearness and divine familiarity became theirs. Those who are the Lord's constant guests will find that he will never let any be injured within his gates.

Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. The omnipotent Lord will shield all those who dwell with him; they will remain under his care as guests