

The Great Prophet Speaks Again

Ps 90:1 *A Prayer of Moses, the man of God.*¹

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.

2 Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

3 You return man to dust and say, "Return, O children of man!"

4 For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.

5 You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning:

6 in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.

7 For we are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed.

8 You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.

9 For all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh.

10 The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.

11 Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you?

12 So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

13 Return, O LORD! How long? Have pity on your servants!

¹ The superscription in the Targum: "The prayer *that* Moses *the prophet of the LORD* prayed when the people, the house of Israel, sinned in the wilderness. He raised his voice and thus he said:" (Ps 90:1 PST)

14 Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

15 Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil.

16 Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children.

17 Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!"

Ps 91:1

ESV

Ly Translation in Giants: Sons of the Gods

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.²

² I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

³ For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence.

⁴ He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

⁵ You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day,

⁶ nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness,

He who dwells in the shelter of the Elyon will abide in the shadow of Shaddai.

He will say to the Yahweh, "My refuge and my fortress, my Elohim in whom I trust."

For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the nocturnal demon.

He shall cover you with his pinions, and overshadow you with his wings, his truth shall be your shield and buckler.

You shall not fear the night demon, nor the arrow-shooting Layla who shoots her arrows in the day.

Nor the diseased ghost that walks in darkness;

² While there is not superscription in the Hebrew, there is in the LXX: "Praise of a Song, by David" (Ps 91:1)

nor the destruction that wastes
at noonday.

⁷ A thousand may fall at your
side, ten thousand at your
right hand, but it will not
come near you.

⁸ You will only look with your
eyes
and see the recompense of the
wicked.

⁹ Because you have made the
LORD your dwelling place--
the Most High, who is my
refuge--

¹⁰ no evil shall be allowed to
befall you,
no plague come near your tent.

¹¹ For he will command his
angels concerning you to
guard you in all your ways.

¹² On their hands they will
bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against
a stone.

¹³ You will tread on the lion
and the adder;
the young lion and the serpent
you will trample underfoot.

¹⁴ "Because he holds fast to
me in love,
I will deliver him; I will protect
him,
because he knows my name.

¹⁵ When he calls to me, I will
answer him;

nor the noon day demon.

A thousand shall fall at your
side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.

You will only look with your eyes
and see the recompense of the
wicked.

Because you have made the
Yahweh your dwelling place—
Elyon, who is my refuge.

No evil shall be allowed to befall
you,
no plague come near your tent.

For he will command his angels
concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.

On their hands they will bear
you up,
lest you strike your foot against
a stone.

You will tread on the lion-
headed demons,
you shall trample the lion and
the dragon.

Because he holds fast to me in
love,
I will deliver him; I will protect
him,
because he knows my name.

When he calls to me, I will
answer him;

I will be with him in trouble;
I will rescue him and honor
him.

¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy
him
and show him my salvation."''

I will be with him in trouble;
I will rescue him and honor him.

With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation.

Ps 92:1 *A Psalm. A Song for the Sabbath.*³

It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O
Most High;

² to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness
by night,

³ to the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre.

⁴ For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work; at the works of
your hands I sing for joy.

⁵ How great are your works, O LORD! Your thoughts are very deep!

⁶ The stupid man cannot know; the fool cannot understand this:

⁷ that though the wicked sprout like grass and all evildoers flourish,
they are doomed to destruction forever;

⁸ but you, O LORD, are on high forever.

⁹ For behold, your enemies, O LORD, for behold, your enemies shall
perish; all evildoers shall be scattered.

¹⁰ But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox; you have
poured over me fresh oil.

¹¹ My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies; my ears have
heard the doom of my evil assailants.

¹² The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in
Lebanon.

¹³ They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the
courts of our God.

¹⁴ They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green,

³ The Targum's superscription: "A psalm *and* song *that the first Adam uttered concerning the Sabbath day*" (Ps 92:1). The LXX, "Praise of a Song, by David."

¹⁵ to declare that the LORD is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him."

Psalm 90-92

RECAP TO BOOK IV

THE BOOK OF PSALMS BEGINS by contemplating a man. “Blessed is the man...” it starts. This man is **planted by waters** because he is upright (Ps 1). We don’t know if this man is generic or specific. In Psalm 2, we learn quickly that he is called the anointed—*messiah*, who also happens to be the son of God. Thus, its last words are, “Blessed are all who trust/take refuge in him” (Ps 2:12). In this way, the whole book opens by “celebrating the anointed (king) of YHWH and his ultimate success in the face of raging nations.”⁴ The rest of the book will develop in a myriad of ways what this means for us who worship this God.

As it does, we see quickly that the psalms are filled with songs written by David, the anointed son of God and king of Israel. His monarchy soon comes under fire, and **laments**

⁴ Robert E. Wallace, *The Narrative Effect of Book IV of the Hebrew Psalter*, Studies in Biblical Literature 112 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 87.

begin to dominate. They reach their most desperate hour in the Psalter in Psalms 88-89 where we sing a song of almost complete despair (88), followed by another that seeks an answer to the question of how God's great covenant with David with all its one-sided, gracious promises can be true when everything in this world as it looks right now screams out the opposite.

Today we look at Psalms 90-92 together. These three songs open what is commonly referred to as the fourth book within the one great book of the Psalter (each mini-book ends in a single verse doxology added by the editor). With Psalms 1-2 serving as an Introduction, the five books are:

Book I (Psalms 3-41)

Book II (Psalms 42-72)

Book III (Psalms 73-89)

Book IV (Psalms 90-106)

Book V (Psalms 107-150)

Now, we are Christians and we have been reading the Psalms 3,000 years after many of them were written, 2,000 years after the Lord Jesus came and taught his church that he

is ultimately “The Man” of Psalms 1-2, and in fact the entire Psalter. It is good and right for us to do this. But imagine being a Jew sometime in the OT, perhaps living in exile in Assyria or Babylon, or perhaps just coming back into your land, but with no king, no son of David, to rule over you. This seems to have been the driving thought behind whoever was tasked with compiling the various song into one great hymnbook.

As we come to Book IV, we left with this terrible problem we just saw in Psalms 88-89. Think about this problem of having no king and this kingly, eternal covenant that seems to have been forgotten by God in light of the fact that most scholars today consider Book IV “the editorial center”⁵ or more spiritually, “the theological heart of the Psalter.”⁶ What that means is that we would expect to see some significant changes in the kinds of songs that are placed here, changes that will move the main objective of the editor forward in a way we have not seen in the first 89 songs.⁷

⁵ Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, vol. 76; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 216.

⁶ Elizabeth H. P. Backfish, “The Shape of the Psalter and the Lord’s Covenant Faithfulness through Israel’s Disobedience,” *Testamentum Imperium* Vol. 3 (2011),

http://www.preciousheart.net/ti/2011/093_Backfish_Divine_Covenant_Faithfulness.pdf.

⁷ Let us recall again the basic fact that the psalms were written individually, for their own unique time and place. However, at some point, someone had to compile them into a book. A magical

What I want to show you today is that this is exactly what we see, and it is a beautiful thing that our priestly-scribe has done for us. But all this is going to do is make our interpretation that Christ is the center of the psalms *all that more secure, especially when we get into the meat of Book IV about Israel's king*. Until then, we will consider our trio of songs today as an introduction to the rest of this mini-book.⁸

With the bleak lamentations of Psalm 88-89 as the backdrop, **Robert Wallace** asks a question as he introduces Psalm 90, “**To whom can the people of Israel turn to give them instruction in this formative time of despair?**”⁹ This is a very important question for understanding why, of all the

wind did not sweep through the temple library late one enchanted evening and blow 150 scrolls and parchments, written over perhaps as long a span as 1,000 years, strewn across several tables and bins upward into the air only to fall neatly into the king's lap as a one great mystical book that we now call Psalms. Great care and thought, and I believe divine superintending, went into the compiling of the Psalter. He was trying to organize the songs in such a way that their order itself would teach, like any book does, some greater point. It is a point you wouldn't necessarily get by singing these songs as singles, but only by listening to the whole record. It is a point that would meet the longings, sufferings, and questions of the people in his day.

⁸ “Psalm 91 has been placed between two chiasmic psalms, the trio of which may be read as an introduction to the fourth book of the Psalter.” *Psalms for Preaching and Worship: A Lectionary Commentary*, ed. Roger E. Van Harn, Brent A. Strawn (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 236. Others who read these songs as a unit, perhaps all by Moses, include **Wallace**; **Erich Zenger**, “The God of Israel's Reign over the World (Psalms 90–106),” 167–168; **David M. Howard**, *The Structure of Psalms 93–100* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 172–174; **David M. Howard**, “A Contextual Reading of Psalms 90–94,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (ed. J. Clint McCann; JSOT Supplement Series, 159; ed. David Clines and Philip Davies; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 112; **Jerome Creach**, *Yahweh as Refuge and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (JSOT 217; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 93–96 (this is n. 52, 100-101).

⁹ Wallace, 18.

150 psalms, the only named song of Moses comes next. “*A prayer of Moses, the man of God*” (Psalm 90:1). A song of Moses begins Book IV! Who can they turn to? Moses! He is not done speaking to us.

“The superscription of Ps 90,” he explains, “reminds the reader of one who came before David—one who was the archetype for prophet ... Israel once again hears a message from Moses.”¹⁰ This and the next two songs thus “mark a shift in focus for the reader. An authoritative voice from Israel’s past intercedes on behalf of the nation.”¹¹ Or, as 2,000 years ago the Targum put its superscription, “*The prayer that Moses the prophet of the LORD prayed when the people, the house of Israel, sinned in the wilderness. He raised his voice and thus he said...*”

Before heading into Psalm 90, let’s think for just a moment about why we might want look at Psalms 90-92 together. There are many reasons for this. First, notice that there is no superscription for Psalm 91. It is blank.¹² However, at least six ancient Hebrew manuscripts join Psalm

¹⁰ Wallace, 18.

¹¹ Wallace, 88.

¹² The LXX does have one: “*Praise of a song, by David.*” This demonstrates that we do not know with certainty who wrote this song. Nevertheless, consider what we will say about this song.

90 and 91 into one song.¹³ **Second**, all *three* songs have many word-connections to each other, and more importantly, back to Moses—especially his great song in Deuteronomy 32 and the next chapter 33.¹⁴ So at the very least, their themes overlap with those of Moses and this was deliberate in the way they were placed together. **Third**, Psalm 92 is called, “**A Psalm. A Song for the Sabbath.**” As such, it can be read as a kind of climatic song (like the seventh day was to the first six), which makes sense if the three are being linked as a kind of introduction to Book IV. Furthermore, the Targum connects this song back to Adam (“*A psalm and song that the*

¹³ Codices 74, 97, 133, 245, 260, and 326; Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, 134.

¹⁴ **PSALM 90**: “Man of God” (vs. 1 superscription): Dt 33:1; “dwelling place” (vs. 1): Dt 33:27; “all generations” (*dor wador*; vs. 1); Dt 32:7; mountains give birth (vs. 2) = Dt 32:18 (God gives birth); feminine form of “years” (90:15):Dt 32:7 (first fem. form of “years” in Bible); “your work” (*po’al*): Dt 32:4 (the Rock’s work-*po’al*); “turn” (*shuv*) and “relent” (*nacham*) in 90:13: Ex 32:12.

PSALM 91: the names of God--Shaddai (91:1): Ex 6:3 and Elyon (91:1): Dt 32:8; Pinions (91:4) = Dt 32:11; “I will protect those who know my name” (91:14): Dt 32:3 “I will call on the name of Yahweh;” Arrows that fly by day (91:5): YHWH will send arrows against the disobedient generation (Dt 32:23); Lion and adder (91:13): Dt 32:24 wild beasts and venom; Pestilence (91:6) and pestilence Dt 28:21.

PSALM 92 (both to Moses and to 90-91): Refuge/dwelling-place: 90:1; 91:2, 4, 9; Elyon (92:2; 91:2); (deed) *p’al* (90:16; 92:5; Dt 32:4; 33:11); the rock who is upright, perfect, and just (92:16): Dt 32:4.

These are all discussed in **Wallace**, 19-29.

One interesting one not discussed by him is 95:5, “**How great are your works, O Lord! Your thoughts are very deep!**” In *OT Quotations and Allusions in the NT*, David Jones has this as a counterpart: “**And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, ‘Great and amazing are your deed, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!’**” (Rev 15:3). It is possible that John is takes this from Psalm 92 and ascribing it to Moses, for this is the closest Moses ever comes to saying these things.

first Adam uttered concerning the Sabbath day”), and Moses is the one who told us about Adam. Finally, the Sabbath is the seventh day [return to this when introducing Psalm 92 and how it is the seventh of seven songs for the week in the Psalter], and curiously Moses is mentioned by name seven times in Book IV.¹⁵

For these reasons, we will be looking at these three songs together. We will use them as a way of introducing the rest of Book IV, as well as in their own right as they begin to answer the questions posed at the end of Book III. Put together with Psalms 88-89 we have the following progression:

88-89, the reality of exile or God forsaking his people

90, the prayer for deliverance from it

91, a blessing on the people to avoid it in the future (Wallace, 26)

92, praise because God will do it (Wallace, 31)

¹⁵ Psalm 90:1; 99:6; 103:7; 105:26; 106:16, 23, 32. He is mentioned only one other time in the entire Psalter (77:20).

PSALM 90: A PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE

If Psalms 88-89 pose a problem, what is the only real solution to it? **Prayer!** If nothing else, Psalm 90 teaches you to pray when problems arise in your life. Don't stay silent before God. Tell him about it. Pray. This is "*A Prayer of Moses, the man of God.*" Not only does the language "man of God" come from **Deut 33:1**, it shows you that what men (or women!) of God do is pray. It is not weakness to pray, but godliness, strength, and power.

Using **Moses' prayer as a model** teaches you **how to pray**. **First**, it is a prayer of **trust and remembrance**. "**Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.**" If it is true that it looks like God's promises are failing, then remember the past and how he has never failed. **Trust** is found in seeing that it is God himself who is the dwelling place of man, his "refuge" as Psalm 2 put it. **Remembrance** is found "in all generations." God has never failed to be the dwelling place of his people, so why should that start now?

Second, it is a prayer of **wisdom**. Therefore, it makes you wise. "**Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world...**" (**Ps 90:2**). This

language reminds us of Job 38, a wisdom text of Israel.¹⁶ **Vs. 3** talks about man dying: “**You return man to dust.**” **Vs. 5** talks about him being “**renewed in the morning,**” and together they remind us of **Eccl 3:5**, “**A time to be born, a time to die.**” And the first petition in the song is for God to “**teach**” his people (**vs. 12**).

If Moses’ prayer teaches you wisdom, *what* can you learn from it? We learn the two most important things we can learn in all the world. We learn **the truth about God**, and **the truth about ourselves**.¹⁷ Then, we learn the distance between us.

About God we learn two things. **First**, he is **eternal**. Second, he is completely **sovereign**. Before the mountains or the earth (Israel?) and the world (everything else?) (**vs. 2**). Mountains know that they have been there for a very long time. They don’t ever seem to change. God was around before them. Of course, the earth itself is even older, because the mountains grew up out of it. God is even older. The

¹⁶ These wisdom references are footnoted in Wallace, 21-22.

¹⁷ Alden has a chiasm that splits these apart: vv. 1-2 and vv. 2-17. **Robert L. Alden**, “Chiastic Psalms (II): S Study in the Mechanics of Semitic Poetry in Psalms 51-100, *JETS* 17/1 (1974): 198-99 [191-200].

metaphor is that he has no beginning. Thus, the verse concludes, “**from everlasting to everlasting you are God**” (2).

We then get a taste of **how God experiences time**. You know how the older you get, the faster time seems to go by? When you are in second grade, it feels like you’ve been in it forever! But when you get out of school, you wonder how so many years could be so fast. Moses understood the relationship therefore to God. “**For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night**” (4). Some might want to say that this teaches a particular view of God’s relationship to time (i.e. he is outside of time or he is eternally temporal). I’m not sure that is really its purpose.¹⁸

Others might want to point out that Peter quotes this verse (2Pe 3:8) when talking about **the Second Coming**, that God is not slow in its arrival, because he does not count time

¹⁸ **Going Deeper:** The language it uses is still temporal. In other words, it seems to place a past, present, future aspect to God’s relationship to time. There is “before” and “yesterday” and “night” and God seems to have some relationship to it. What most don’t understand about this more common view is that when they say God is “outside of time” (atemporal), this means that God has no relationship to time this way. Instead, to a God like this, everything just “is.” All is one big “now.” Adam is in the Garden “now.” Jesus is dying on the cross “now.” I am typing this sentence “now.” Jesus is returning in the Second Coming “now.” It’s all exactly the same to God. I’ve never thought this idea is very coherent, but if the concern of Moses is not philosophical (and I doubt that it is), we probably can’t gain much at all about this question from verses like this.

as we do. His application is future oriented, but he actually grounds his point in the Psalm itself. “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promises as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” This seems to be the very idea that the scribe who put this song here has in mind for the people of his day. Things seem terrible now and like God has forgotten his covenant with David. He hasn’t.

Therefore, the doctrine of God that he is the Ancient of Days is used here not in some abstract way to puff up your head, but rather in a concrete way to encourage you that even though it *seems* like God has forgotten, he hasn’t. He just isn’t like you, and his purposes are beyond your comprehension. In fact, **vs. 1** summarizes why this matters (and it isn’t just to blow your mind, which it does. What kid hasn’t asked, “Who made God?”). “Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.” Because he is eternal, he has always been there for and with his people, and they take refuge in him. Even when things seem at their worst.

Second, God is sovereign. Notice who made the earth (**vs. 2**). God did! It didn’t come into existence by chance. Notice what God does with the days. “You sweep them [the

days] away as with a flood; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning: in the morning it flourishes and is renewed...” (Ps 90:5-6a). Each day comes anew, because God renews them every morning. Those things that you count on—the sun rise, the next day—they are reliable because God is sovereign over them.

God is also sovereign over your life. “You return man to dust and say, ‘Return, O children of man!’” (3). Just as God has power over bringing each day to a close (“the evening it fades and withers; 6b), so also he has power over your life and death. “Return!” It isn’t accidental. When he decrees that this is the end, that is the end. He gives days and he brings them to an end. Men spend all their time trying to live forever. It is foolish. Our days are in God’s hands. If God is sovereign like this, why do men defy him? Why won’t they bow before a God who promises to be present with them for good while he gives them life?

The answer is that in this statement, we also begin to learn about ourselves. Unlike God, we are not of old. Nor will we remain here very long. The reference to “dust” reminds us of Eden and Adam who came from the dust and returned to it. So, we learn that we pass away. Your

mortality seems to be the main point of this song. It continues for quite some time in it.

It makes you sing about why you will die. **Sin**. Sin is a violation of the basic commands of God, which he gave for your good. It is a rejection of his kingship, his authority, his sovereignty over your life. It is a desire to be autonomous, to do things your way, as if God wasn't really sovereign. But he is. So you die.

Moses is remembering the sins of his own generation, including his own sins that caused him not to enter the Promised Land. “For we are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence (face)” (7-8). The “**presence**” is probably a veiled reference to the Angel, as it is throughout Moses' writings. God was with them, but they rebelled.

Thus, “All our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh” (9). This would have taught the children of Israel some very important lessons in Moses' day. In the context of the Psalter and the current laments with no king, it means the same thing. God hates sin,

and he wrath burns out against it. Therefore, we go out with a whimper, a sigh.

Next, we learn **why this matters**. “The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.” Moses lived 120 years. David, about 80. Jesus lived 33 years. You don’t know how many you have. Seventy or eighty is a long time for most throughout history. But when it’s over, it’s over. “I’ll fly away O Glory, I’ll fly away,” the old spiritual sings, remembering this verse. But that is only a glorious song if you learn wisdom from this one.

“Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you?” (11). It matters nothing how long you live if you do not spend your life thinking about why you will die. “So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom” (12). Why? So that you can live a life pleasing to God, and frankly, helpful to yourself. Do you want to be able to sing the spiritual? Not all will be happy on their day of their death.

“Return, O LORD! How long? Have pity on your servants!” (13). This wonderful little verse looks **forward to the future** in hope and faith. It is the heart of the prayer.

Return to us, God. In favor. We know this side of the cross that he did. But they were awaiting that day. Peter seems to have been thinking about this, and longed for the Second Coming, for while the First Coming did away with the penalty of sin, only the Second finally destroys its power.

When you learn about who God is (infinite, powerful, Lord, holy), and what you are in relation to him (finite, sinful, creation), and you cry out to him for him to return to you, to come to you, to be with you so that you might have refuge in him, then everything changes. “Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil. Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!” (14-17).

Here we see that **God becomes our satisfaction**. The pleasures of the world are what fade away, and we long to be more like him and to be with him. We see that **God makes us glad**. But this is in the midst of suffering, *suffering that he caused!* There are so many people who refuse to acknowledge

the theological teaching of vs. 15, “... as many days as you have afflicted us.” But Moses knew well the sovereign hand of the LORD to bring testing and affliction upon his people. He saw it all the time.

But he also saw the amazing works of God, which form the first of a duo in vv. 16-17. “Let your work be shown ... and establish the work of our hands.” When you see the work of God in your life, for chastisement or for salvation, you are ready to be established in wisdom. And the work of your hand from the day do until the day he calls you home, are established by him.

PSALM 91: THE PRAYER IS ANSWERED, THE BLESSING IS GIVEN

If Psalm 90 is a reminding prayer from Moses, setting the stage for Book IV, Psalm 91 becomes a demonstration that God answers. And it is a most remarkable song **for what it is that God answers!** Remember again that it is possible that Moses wrote it. His other two songs (Ex 15:1-18 and Deut 32) sing of the triumphant victory of Yahweh in the Red Sea over the forces of evil in and above Egypt and then in

remembering 40 years of wandering in a desert, he cautions Israel not to trust in false gods and demons or they will devour them. Curiously, the warning of Deut 32 gives way to great blessings of Deut 33 and the same pattern is followed in Psalms 88-91 with Psalm 91 being a great blessing upon the people in a very unexpected way.

Along these lines, the first thing to know about this song is that it plays a very important place **in the life of Jesus**. As such, it looks forward like Ps 90 did. **Vv. 11-12** are quoted in the Gospels at the temptation of Jesus by Satan. **“For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone”** (**Matt 4:6; Luke 2:10**). The temptation was that he was taken to the pinnacle of the **temple** and told to **jump**. These verses were then quoted by Satan as proof that God would listen to his prayer and save him. What’s just as interesting, is that Jesus quotes Moses back to him (remember I said several manuscripts attribute this song to Moses?), **“You shall not put the Lord your God to the test”** (cf. **Dt 6:16**).

The testing/temptation of Jesus is a reenactment of the testing/temptation of Israel. Compare these two verses.

“Then [after the baptism] Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil” (Matt 4:1). “Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur” (Ex 15:22 NIV). Where did Moses take them? First, they came to the waters of Marah (bitterness), where they grumbled. Then they came to Elim (“the gods”) with its seventy palms and 12 springs of water. Immediately, God tested them with manna from heaven.

What is Satan? He is “the god of this world” (2Co 4:4). He is a thief come to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). He prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1Pe 5:8).

Now consider that this song begins by saying, “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty” (Ps 91:1). There’s a lot here. Dwelling in the Most High is very similar to 90:1s, “Our dwelling place” Lord.¹⁹ “Almighty” is the word El Shaddai. It can mean “God of the Mountain” (note that in the verse,

¹⁹ **Going deeper.** The first word used of God here is Elyon (“Most High”). Given the many parallels to Deut 32 that we saw earlier (see n. 13), this is what Moses calls God in Deut 32:8, when the sons of God are given by Elyon to the nations. That entire song is supercharged, like this one, with supernatural, demonic entities. For example, “They sacrificed to demons that were not God, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently” (17) or They have made me jealous with what is not God (or with idols; 21) or arrows coming and devouring with pestilence and beasts and venom (24) or “their rock is not our Rock” (31), etc.

we abide in the shadow of Shaddai). 90:2 says, “Before the mountains were brought forth...”

But it can also mean “God of the Wilderness.” Think about Jesus and Moses. But it gets more interesting. Several words that are translated normally in this psalm by the ESV are: “pestilence” (3); “night” (5); “terror” (5); “pestilence” (6), “destruction” (6), “lion” (13), and “serpent” (13). However, as I discovered in my study on demons and giants several years ago, these words all have entries in the *Dictionary of Deities and Demons of the Bible* so that you could also say (and in some cases should say), “nocturnal demon,” “night demon,” “Layla” (possibly related to Lilith, a kind of early vampire, the night hag who stole away kids to suck their blood and eat their flesh and has a fascinating history in Israel’s extra-biblical mythology), “diseased ghost,” “noon day demon,” “lion-headed demons” and “the dragon.”

In this regard, there isn’t another Psalm that comes close to matching this kind of strangeness, and only a couple of passages in the entire Bible can. But think about it in the context with Jesus and *Satan*! If this song is saying that God will protect you from supernatural evil, that makes Satan’s temptation so much more powerful! He didn’t wrench this

out of context. He was tempting Jesus with something that was true! Basically, God will protect you from me if you do this, Jesus. The great lie was not that he cherry picked Scripture, but that through truth, he tried to get the Lord to stop following his Father. Satan is a master tempter, and frankly, we have no idea.

Let's look at the song briefly. It has a **chiastic structure**, meaning that verses pair up with each other, and this can be instructive. **Vv. 1-2** have “dwelling,” “abiding,” “refuge,” and “fortress.” Four words for God compliment them: **Elyon, Shaddai, Yahweh, and Elohim**. Their complement in the structure of the song are **vv. 14-16**. Here, God holds me fast in love, delivers, protects, knows my name (14), answers prayer, is with him in trouble, rescues, honors (15), gives “long life” and “salvation” (16). How perfect these in turn complement the themes of Psalm 90, and even earlier, 88-89. But they also answer things in *this* song.

Vs. 3 and 13 are a unit. “For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence.” “You will tread on the lion and the adder (lion-headed demons), the young lion and the serpent (dragon) you will trample underfoot.” We can easily think of stories in the life of Moses

here. Many of them. But ultimately, the promise is that Satan will not defeat you. “Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you” (Luke 10:19).

This verse in Luke is not talking about crawling things in the desert. The verse before it talks about Satan falling like lightning from heaven. The verse before that, about demons being subject to us in your Name (remember vs. 14?). The verse after it talks about spirits being subject to you. So also with Psalm 91. It is fulfilled in the ministry of the Lord Jesus. Jesus makes this song work for you!

What is a fowler? This is a pretty antiquated word. It isn't a golfer who wears colorful clothes. It is someone who pursues wild game to kill them (the fowl) for food. He most often does this by **laying a snare**, a trap on the ground. The game is just minding its own business when ... SLAM! The jaws of death snap and crush the prey. *The devil prowls around ... seeking whom he may devour.* **Pestilence** (*deber*) may be as much demonic imagery as it is natural disease through

pests.²⁰ The song is saying that the Lord protects you from these traps of his. But not only this, Christ gives authority to tell them to bug off!

The next pair: “He shall overshadow you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler” (4). “For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone” (11-12). You can hear how they both concern God’s help. As someone put it, “His wings and feathers cover and deflect, and His angels guard and protect.”²¹

The motherly-like protection of the bird hovering over its young, protecting them from the elements and foul creatures, the image is again of finding refuge in God. The “wings” of God are an image for the Holy Spirit for Moses (Gen 1:2; Deut 32:10-11; cf. Isa 63:10-11). The shield is a large defensive weapon carried by straps and worn on the

²⁰ This, and all the other supernatural interpretations are taken from the various entries in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*.

²¹ Christine Miller, “Psalm 91 Your Shield and Buckler,” *ALittlePerspective*, <http://www.alittleperspective.com/psalm-91/>. Christian has quite a few blog posts on this psalm, and they are quite interesting, as most people commenting on this are not home school mothers. Worth a read.

arm, while the **buckler** is a smaller shield held with the hand in a fist grip. Here, it is “truth” that is called the shield. In Ephesians, it is faith. Why? Perhaps because we need faith to believe that the truth will overcome the lies of the evil one.

What are his lies? The same Ephesians verse talks about the “**fiery darts of the wicked [one].**” This would be a **fiery arrow** in the psalm. Curiously, the next pairing begins, “**You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day**” (5). When you understand that “**terror of the night**” is the word *Layla*, and that **Eric Clapton** didn’t make that word up, but that it depicts a stalking demon who lays in wait for young prey (the Targum has, “demons who walk at night”), you start to see that Paul is probably thinking of our very song throughout Eph 6.

Vs. 6 continues the strangeness. “**Nor the pestilence (*deber* again) that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.**” This time, both the Targum and the LXX see this as supernatural. “**Of the death that walks in darkness, of the band of demons that attacks at noon**” (Ps Targum). “**Nor of the evil thing that walks in darkness; nor of calamity, and the evil spirit at noon-day**” (LXX). The equivalent of the Destruction may be **Resheph**, the plague-

god to the north of Israel, which they would have identified as a demon. This pair is completed by **vs. 10**. “No evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent.” It literally means it. And it reminds me of the curious way **the Shema** is written in the Targum: “The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and grant thee peace. *The Lord bless thee in all thy business, and keep thee from demons of the night, and things that cause terror, and from demons of the noon and of the morning, and from malignant spirits and phantoms*” (**Num 6:24** PJE).

In Ephesians 6, we have that well known but probably not all that well believed verse, “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (**Eph 6:12**). Psalm 91 helps us see it. Is it any wonder that “In Jewish sources and liturgy the psalm is in fact called ‘a song for evil encounters’ to be recited before sleep.”²²

²² M. Malul, [“Terror of the Night,”](#) ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 852.

The center of the song is vv. 8-9. “But you, O LORD, are on high forever. For behold, your enemies, O LORD, for behold, your enemies shall perish; all evildoers shall be scattered” (8-9). This really only makes sense if the song has been talking about evil entities of some kind, rather than natural disasters and plagues of snakes. But it shows us that God is Lord over all creation. As it does so, it begins to answer Psalm 90’s prayer, but in a way we did not expect. It also looks forward to the rest of Book IV which is all about Yahweh as King, rather than David.

PSALM 92: PRAISE AND ENTERING GOD’S RESTFUL BLESSING

Psalm 92 finishes the trio of introductory songs. Its superscription reads, “*A Psalm. A Song for the Sabbath.*” Curiously, there are seven songs associated with the Sabbath week in the Psalter, each one is associated with a different day (in their chronological order): 24, 48, 82, 94, 81, 93, 92. This one is associated with the last day, the Sabbath itself. Of course, Yahweh’s name appears seven times in it (1, 4, 5, 8, 9, 13, 15). But why place it here?

We've seen how the previous two songs are used in the NT to refer to things future to those songs. This is how this song was read as well. The **Mishna** reads, "It is a psalm and a song for the era to come, the day that is entirely Sabbath and contentment for life everlasting" (Mishna Tamid 7:4). In my view, what God is doing here is showing that the fulfillment of the previous two songs really doesn't happen until this Great Sabbath Day is ushered in. This, of course, is related to Jesus giving permission to trample on scorpions and serpents and his overcoming the temptation of the devil.

The song begins on a musical note. "It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your Name, O Most High (Elyon)" (Ps 92:1). This is the name usually associated with Gentiles! But it is also related to Psalm 91. "I will protect him, because he knows my Name" (91:14) now becomes, "I give thanks because I know your Name." Thus, the promises of Psalm 91 will not be empty!

"To declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night" (2). Contrast this to the daytime and nighttime demons of the previous song! "To the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre" (3). This is

usually done in **corporate worship**, and as such fits the theme of the Sabbath perfectly.

Why sing? **Because of who God is.** “For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy” (4). The prayer at the end of Psalm 91 is now answered! “How great are your works, O LORD! Your thoughts are very deep!” (5). While we could say that God’s thoughts in general are very deep (and true enough, who can fathom anything God thinks), the emphasis is on his *thoughts that caused him to bring about his great and mighty works*. In other words, it isn’t abstract, but personal again, **his works of salvation** for Israel and all the thoughts that went into birthing, growing, sending into slavery, freeing, granting, loving, chastising, having mercy, and so on. These are thoughts worth contemplating.

Like Psalm 90, God is now contrasted with man. “The stupid man cannot know; the fool cannot understand this: that though the wicked sprout like grass and all evildoers flourish, they are doomed to destruction forever; but you, O LORD, are on high forever” (6-8). Yes, sometimes the word “stupid” is biblical. Biblically stupid people are fools. What

makes them foolish? Lack of intelligence? No. Something else.

They do not understand evil (the wicked). They do not understand God's common grace (the sprout like grass and flourish). They do not understand mortality and punishment for their sin (they are doomed to destruction forever). And they do not understand God's kingship (on high forever).

This last language of being enthroned on high may be connected to the Sabbath day of Genesis 2:3. And it's interesting in this regard that the Targum actually assigns this Psalm to Adam (*A psalm and song that the first Adam uttered concerning the Sabbath day*). “God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.” When read as the story of the great King making his temple, the creation week, which ends like this, teaches that the seventh day is the day God's enthronement rest.

While we have different reasons for going to Genesis 1 in our day, this would have been the first thought in their day, as many scholars has demonstrated.²³ The point is, this is not out of the blue for a song for the Sabbath Day. It is

²³ See my sermons on this passage for more.

very much the point. **God is King**, and this nicely finishes this introductory theme that will become the central theme of Book IV, which is remarkable because Book III ended with Israel having no King and God seemingly giving up on them. The answer? I am your King. Watch what I will do.

As King, **God is powerful over his enemies**. We've seen supernatural enemies in Psalm 91. But there are plenty of human enemies as well. Whatever enemies they are, **"Behold, your enemies, O LORD, for behold, your enemies shall perish; all evildoers shall be scattered"** (9). Let wisdom teach you about these things as you consider the end of the three song set.

"But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox; you have poured over me fresh oil" (10). It may be because of this line that the LXX assigns this psalm to David. This is language that a king would use. But the Hebrew text has no superscription. We can't say that we really know who wrote it. Given the links to the previous two songs, even Moses is just as good a guess as anyone.²⁴

But in this case, I do not think David or Solomon is necessarily the one in view, though they (he) could certainly

²⁴ See especially the end of n. 14.

be one among many who are, at least in one sense. But it could also be someone else. “My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies; my ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants” (11). Who ultimately said this through complete victory? Christ.

Think of this prophetically as you also hear these words that remind us of Psalm 1 again, right where we began this morning. “The righteous flourish like a palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the courts of our God. They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green, to declare that the LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him” (12-15). In Psalm 1, while generally speaking it talks of any righteous man, it is without question that “The Man” is one man. But this Psalm starts to get at how the righteousness of the One Man is transferred to others.

Like the man of Psalm 1, they flourish and grow like trees. But someone has pointed out, “No longer is the productive tree planted by the streams of water. Now, the flourishing tree is planted in the house of YHWH and the courts of God. The tree is no longer reliant upon God’s

provision indirectly (through the stream) but directly (in the court it will have direct attention).”²⁵ The Psalter is moving us somewhere.

In this song, I would suggest that it is looking to the NT Sabbath Day in Christ? “For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience” (Heb 4:8-11).

What does it mean to enter this rest? Does it not mean that you confess that God is your dwelling place, that you pray to him in your distress, and most of all, that you trust in his Name? (Ps 90). Is it not entering being sheltered by the Most High, protected by him from all evil, and knowing that the Lord Jesus overcame the devil in his own temptation (Ps 91). And is it not singing the praises of the Name from your heart, morning and night, while contemplating God's deep and mysterious ways (Ps 91), his sovereign and powerful providence, your own sinful rebellion, and his glorious

²⁵ Wallace, 29.

forgiveness through the death and resurrection of the Son of God?

Therefore, as you consider these introductory songs of Book IV. Think long and hard on these things. And sing them to yourself time and again. Then, be prepared for more glories to come in this Book IV. Most of all, don't waste even a moment of your time this Lord's Day worshiping and praising this God who has told you so many wonderful things about himself and has now brought them to pass through the risen Savior Jesus Christ.