

— THE MAJESTIC —  
**COVENANT PSALM**  
AN EXPOSITION OF PSALM 89



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# **The Majestic Covenant Psalm**

## **An Exposition of Psalm 89**

by Charles Spurgeon

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## **PSALM 89**

**I Will Sing of the Steadfast Love of the  
Lord**

A Maskila of Ethan the Ezrahite.

1I will sing of the steadfast love of the Lord, forever;  
with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all  
generations.

2For I said, "Steadfast love will be built up forever;  
in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness."

3You have said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one;  
I have sworn to David my servant:

4'I will establish your offspring forever,  
and build your throne for all generations.'" Selah

5Let the heavens praise your wonders, O Lord,  
your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones!

6For who in the skies can be compared to the Lord?

Who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord,

7a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones,  
and awesome above all who are around him?

8O Lord God of hosts,  
who is mighty as you are, O Lord,  
with your faithfulness all around you?

9You rule the raging of the sea;  
when its waves rise, you still them.

10You crushed Rahab like a carcass;  
you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm.

11The heavens are yours; the earth also is yours;  
the world and all that is in it, you have founded them.

12The north and the south, you have created them;  
Tabor and Hermon joyously praise your name.

13You have a mighty arm;  
strong is your hand, high your right hand.

14Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;

steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.

15Blessed are the people who know the festal shout,  
who walk, O Lord, in the light of your face,

16who exult in your name all the day  
and in your righteousness are exalted.

17For you are the glory of their strength;  
by your favor our horn is exalted.

18For our shield belongs to the Lord,  
our king to the Holy One of Israel.

19Of old you spoke in a vision to your godly one,<sup>c</sup> and said:

"I have granted help to one who is mighty;  
I have exalted one chosen from the people.

20I have found David, my servant;  
with my holy oil I have anointed him,

21so that my hand shall be established with him;  
my arm also shall strengthen him.

22The enemy shall not outwit him;  
the wicked shall not humble him.

23I will crush his foes before him  
and strike down those who hate him.

24My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him,  
and in my name shall his horn be exalted.

25I will set his hand on the sea  
and his right hand on the rivers.

26He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father,  
my God, and the Rock of my salvation.'

27And I will make him the firstborn,  
the highest of the kings of the earth.

28My steadfast love I will keep for him forever,  
and my covenant will stand firm for him.

29I will establish his offspring forever

and his throne as the days of the heavens.

30If his children forsake my law

and do not walk according to my rules,<sup>e</sup>

31if they violate my statutes

and do not keep my commandments,

32then I will punish their transgression with the rod

and their iniquity with stripes,

33but I will not remove from him my steadfast love

or be false to my faithfulness.

34I will not violate my covenant

or alter the word that went forth from my lips.

35Once for all I have sworn by my holiness;

I will not lie to David.

36His offspring shall endure forever,

his throne as long as the sun before me.

37Like the moon it shall be established forever,

a faithful witness in the skies." Selah

38But now you have cast off and rejected;

you are full of wrath against your anointed.

39You have renounced the covenant with your servant;

you have defiled his crown in the dust.

40You have breached all his walls;

you have laid his strongholds in ruins.

41All who pass by plunder him;

he has become the scorn of his neighbors.

42You have exalted the right hand of his foes;

you have made all his enemies rejoice.

43You have also turned back the edge of his sword,

and you have not made him stand in battle.

44You have made his splendor to cease

and cast his throne to the ground.

45 You have cut short the days of his youth;  
you have covered him with shame. Selah

46 How long, O Lord? Will you hide yourself forever?  
How long will your wrath burn like fire?

47 Remember how short my time is!  
For what vanity you have created all the children of man!

48 What man can live and never see death?  
Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? Selah

49 Lord, where is your steadfast love of old,  
which by your faithfulness you swore to David?

50 Remember, O Lord, how your servants are mocked,  
and how I bear in my heart the insults of all the many nations,

51 with which your enemies mock, O Lord,  
with which they mock the footsteps of your anointed.

52 Blessed be the Lord forever!  
Amen and Amen.

## INTRODUCTION

We have now reached the majestic *Covenant Psalm*, which, according to the Jewish arrangement closes the third book of the Psalms. It is the utterance of a believer, in presence of great national disaster, pleading with his God, urging the grand argument of covenant engagements, and expecting deliverance and help, because of the faithfulness of Jehovah.

**TITLE.** *Maschil*. This is most fitly called a Maschil, for it is most instructive. No subject is more important or is so fully the key to all theology as that of the covenant. He who is taught by the Holy Spirit

to be clear upon the covenant of grace will be a scribe well instructed in the things of the kingdom; he whose doctrinal theory is a mingle mangle of works and grace is scarcely fit to be teacher of babes. *Of Ethan the Ezrahite*: perhaps the same person as Jeduthun, who was a musician in David's reign; was noted for his wisdom in Solomon's days, and probably survived till the troubles of Rehoboam's period. If this be the man, he must have written this Psalm in his old age, when troubles were coming thick and heavy upon the dynasty of David and the land of Judah; this is not at all improbable, and there is much in the Psalm which looks that way.

**DIVISION.** The sacred poet commences by affirming his belief in the faithfulness of the Lord to his covenant with the house of David, and makes his first pause at Ps 89:4. He then praises and magnifies the name of the Lord for his power, justice, and mercy, Ps 89:5-14. This leads him to sing of the happiness of the people who have such a God to be their glory and defence, Ps 89:15-18. He rehearses the terms of the covenant at full length with evident delight, Ps 89:19-37, and then mournfully pours out his complaint and petition, Ps 89:38-51, closing the whole with a hearty benediction and a double Amen. May the Holy Spirit greatly bless to us the reading of this most precious Psalm of instruction.

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## EXPOSITION

**Verse 1.** *I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever.* A devout resolve, and very commendable when a man is exercised with great trouble on account of an apparent departure of the Lord from his



covenant and promise. Whatever we may observe abroad or experience in our own persons, we ought still to praise God for his mercies, since they most certainly remain the same, whether we can perceive them or not. Sense sings but now and then, but faith is an eternal songster. Whether others sing or not, believers must never give over; in them should be constancy of praise, since God's love to them cannot by any possibility have changed, however providence may seem to frown. We are not only to believe the Lord's goodness, but to rejoice in it evermore; it is the source of all our joy, and as it cannot be dried up, so the stream ought never to fail to flow, or cease to flash in sparkling crystal of song. We have not one, but many *mercies* to rejoice in, and should therefore multiply the expressions of our thankfulness. It is *Jehovah* who deigns to deal out to us our daily benefits, and he is the all sufficient and immutable God; therefore our rejoicing in him must never suffer diminution. By no means let his exchequer of glory be deprived of the continual revenue which we owe to it. Even time itself must not bound our praises--they must leap into eternity; he blesses us with eternal mercies--let us sing unto him *forever*.

With my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all *generations*. The utterances of the present will instruct future generations. What Ethan sung is now a text book for Christians, and will be so as long as this dispensation shall last. We ought to have an eye to posterity in all that we write, for we are the schoolmasters of succeeding ages. Ethan first spoke with his mouth that which he recorded with his pen--a worthy example of using both means of communication; the mouth has a warmer manner than the pen, but the pen's speech lives longest, and is heard farther and wider. While reading this Psalm, such in the freshness of the style, that one seems to hear it gushing from the poet's mouth; he makes the letters live and talk, or, rather, sing to us. Note, that in this second sentence he

speaks of *faithfulness*, which is the mercy of God's mercies-- the brightest jewel in the crown of goodness. The grace of an unfaithful God would be a poor subject for music, but unchangeable love and immutable promises demand everlasting songs. In times of trouble it is the divine faithfulness which the soul hangs upon; this is the bower anchor of the soul, its hold fast, and its stay. Because God is, and ever will be, faithful, we have a theme for song which will not be out of date for future generations; it will never be worn out, never be disproved, never be unnecessary, never be an idle subject, valueless to mankind. It will also be always desirable to make it known, for men are too apt to forget it, or to doubt it, when hard times press upon them. We cannot too much multiply testimonies to the Lord's faithful mercy--if our own generation should not need them others will: sceptics are so ready to repeat old doubts and invent new ones that believers should be equally prompt to bring forth evidences both old and new. Whoever may neglect this duty, those who are highly favoured, as Ethan was, should not be backward.

**Verse 2.** *For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever.* His heart was persuaded of it, and he had affirmed it as an indisputable truth. He was certain that upon a sure foundation the Lord intended to pile up a glorious palace of goodness--a house of refuge for all people, wherein the Son of David should for ever be glorified as the dispenser of heavenly grace. Thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens. This divine edifice, he felt assured, would tower into the skies, and would be turreted with divine faithfulness even as its foundations were laid in eternal love. God's faithfulness is no thing of earth, for here nothing is firm, and all things savour of the changes of the moon and the fickleness of the sea: heaven is the birthplace of truth, and there it dwells in eternal vigour. As the blue arch above us remains unimpaired by age, so does the Lord's truth; as in the firmament he hangs his covenant bow, so in the upper

heavens the faithfulness of God is enthroned in immutable glory. This Ethan said, and this we may say; come what will, mercy and faithfulness are built up by "the Eternal Builder", and his own nature is the guarantee for their perpetuity. This is to be called to mind whenever the church is in trouble, or our own spirits bowed down with grief.

**Verse 3.** *I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant.* This was the ground of the Psalmist's confidence in God's mercy and truth, for he knew that the Lord had made a covenant of grace with David and his seed, and confirmed it by an oath. Here he quotes the very words of God, which were revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, and are a condensation of the original covenant in 2Sa 7:1-29. Well might he write in the former verse, "I have said", when he knew that Jehovah had said, "I have sworn." David was the Lord's elect, and with him a covenant was made, which ran along in the line of his seed until it received a final and never ending fulfilment in "the Son of David." David's house must be royal: as long as there was a sceptre in Judah, David's seed must be the only rightful dynasty; the great "King of the Jews" died with that title above his head in the three current languages of the then known world, and at this day he is owned as king by men of every tongue. The oath sworn to David has not been broken, though the temporal crown is no longer worn, for in the covenant itself his kingdom was spoken of as enduring for ever. In Christ Jesus there is a covenant established with all the Lord's *chosen*, and they are by grace led to be the Lord's *servants*, and then are ordained kings and priests by Christ Jesus. How sweet it is to see the Lord, not only making a covenant, but owning to it in after days, and bearing witness to his own oath; this ought to be solid ground for faith, and Ethan, the Ezrahite, evidently thought it so. Let the reader and writer both pause over such glorious lines, and sing of the mercies of the

Lord, who thus avows the bonds of the covenant, and, in so doing, gives a renewed pledge of his faithfulness to it. "*I have*", says the Lord, and yet again "*I have*", as though he himself was nothing loath to dwell upon the theme. We also would lovingly linger over the *ipsissima verba* of the covenant made with David, reading them carefully and with joy. There are thus recorded in 2Sa 7:12-16: "And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shall sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever." After reading this, let us remember that the Lord has said to us by his servant Isaiah, "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David."

**Verse 4.** *Thy seed will I establish for ever.* David must always have a seed, and truly in Jesus this is fulfilled beyond his hopes. What a seed David has in the multitude which have sprung from him who was both his Son and his Lord. The Son of David is the Great Progenitor, the second Adam, the Everlasting Father, he sees his seed, and in them beholds of the travail of his soul. And build up thy throne to all generations. David's dynasty never decays, but on the contrary, is evermore consolidated by the great Architect of heaven and earth. Jesus is a king as well as a progenitor and his throne is ever being built up--his kingdom comes --his power extends. Thus runs the covenant; and when the church declines, it is ours to plead it before the ever faithful God, as the Psalmist does in the latter verses of this sacred song. Christ must reign, but why is his name

blasphemed and his gospel so despised? The more gracious Christians are, the more will they be moved to jealousy by the sad estate of the Redeemer's cause, and the more will they argue the case with the great Covenant maker, crying day and night before him, "Thy kingdom come." Selah. It would not be meet to hurry on. Rest, O reader, at the bidding of this Selah, and let each syllable of the covenant ring in thine ears; and then lift up the heart and proceed with the sacred poet to tell forth the praises of the Lord.

**Verse 5.** *And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O Lord.* Looking down upon what God had done, and was about to do, in connection with his covenant of grace, all heaven would be filled with adoring wonder. The sun and moon, which had been made tokens of the covenant, would praise God for such an extraordinary display of mercy, and the angels and redeemed spirits would sing, "as it were, a new song." Thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints. By which is probably intended the holy ones on earth. So that the "whole family in heaven and earth" would join in the praise. Earth and heaven are one in admiring and adoring the covenant God. Saints above see most clearly into the heights and depths of divine love, therefore they praise its wonders; and saints below, being conscious of their many sins and multiplied provocations of the Lord, admire his faithfulness. The heavens broke forth with music at the wonders of mercy contained in the glad tidings concerning Bethlehem, and the saints who came together in the temple magnified the faithfulness of God at the birth of the Son of David. Since that auspicious day, the general assembly on high and the sacred congregation below have not ceased to sing unto Jehovah, the Lord that keepeth covenant with his elect.

**Verse 6.** *For who in the heaven can be compared unto the Lord -- therefore all heaven worships him, seeing none can equal him. Who*

among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord? -- therefore the assemblies of the saints on earth adore him, seeing none can rival him. Until we can find one equally worthy to be praised, we will give unto the Lord alone all the homage of our praise. Neither among the sons of the morning nor the sons of the mighty can any peer be found for Jehovah, yea none that can be mentioned in the same day; therefore he is rightly praised. Since the Lord Jesus, both as God and as man, is far above all creatures, he also is to be devoutly worshipped. How full of poetic fire is this verse! How bold is the challenge! How triumphant the holy boasting! The sweet singer dwells upon the name of Jehovah with evident exultation; to him the God of Israel is God indeed and God alone. He closely follows the language long before rehearsed by Miriam, when she sang, "Who is like unto thee, O Jehovah, among the gods? Who is like thee?" His thoughts are evidently flying back to the days of Moses and the marvels of the Red Sea, when God was gloriously known by his incommunicable name; there is a ring of timbrels in the double question, and a sound as of the twinkling feet of rejoicing maidens. Have we no poets now? Is there not a man among us who can compose hymns flaming with this spirit? O, Spirit of the living God, be thou the inspirer of some master minds among us!

**Verse 7.** *God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints.* The holiest tremble in the presence of the thrice Holy One: their familiarity is seasoned with the profoundest awe. Perfect love casts out the fear which hath torment, and works in lieu thereof that other fear which is akin to joy unutterable. How reverent should our worship be! Where angels veil their faces, men should surely bow in lowliest fashion. Sin is akin to presumptuous boldness, but holiness is sister to holy fear. "And to be had in reverence of all them that are about him." The nearer they are the more they adore. If mere creatures are struck with awe, the courtiers and favourites of heaven

must be yet more reverent in the presence of the Great King. God's children are those who most earnestly pray "hallowed be thy name." Irreverence is rebellion. Thoughts of the covenant of grace tend to create a deeper awe of God, they draw us closer to him, and the more his glories are seen by us in that nearer access, the more humbly we prostrate ourselves before his Majesty.

**Verse 8.** *O Lord God of hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto thee? Or Jehovah, God of Hosts, who is like thee, Mighty Jah.* Alexander remarks, that the infinite superiority of God to men and angels is here expressed, or rather indicated, by an accumulation of descriptive titles. Here we have the name which displays his self existence, the title which denotes his dominion over all his creatures, and an adjective which sets forth the power with which he exercises his sovereignty. Yet this great and terrible God has entered into covenant with men! Who would not reverence him with deepest love? Or to thy faithfulness round about thee. He dwells in faithfulness; it is said to be the girdle of the loins of his only begotten Son, who is the express image of his person. None in all creation is faithful as he is; even his angels might prove faithless if he left them to themselves, but he cannot "lie unto David", or forget to keep his oath. Men often fail in truth because their power is limited, and then they find it easier to break their word than to keep it; but the strong Jehovah is equal to all his engagements, and will assuredly keep them. Unrivalled might and unparalleled truth are wedded in the character of Jehovah. Blessed be his name that it is so.

**Verse 9.** *Thou rulest the raging of the sea.* Always, even in the hour of ocean's maddest fury, the Lord controls it. At the Red Sea the foaming billows saw their God and stood upright in awe. When the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them. None else can do this; to attempt it would be madness, but the Lord's "hush" silences the

boisterous storm. So did the Lord's Anointed calm the storms of Galilee, for he is Lord of all; so also does the great Ruler of Providence evermore govern the fickle wills of men, and quiet the tumults of the people. As a mother stills her babe to sleep, so the Lord calms the fury of the sea, the anger of men, the tempest of adversity, the despair of the soul, and the rage of hell. "The Lord sitteth upon the floods; yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever", and in all his ruling and over ruling he has respect unto his covenant; therefore, although our house be not so with God as our hearts would wish, yet we will rejoice in his covenant ordered in all things and sure, and delight in him as all our salvation and all our desire.

**Verse 10.** *Thou hast broken Rahab in pieces as one that is slain.* Egypt was crushed like a corpse beneath the chariot wheels of the destroyer: its pomp and glory were broken like the limbs of the dead in battle. Egypt was Israel's ancient foe, and its overthrow wits a theme to which devout minds constantly reverted, as to a subject fit for their most exulting songs. We, too, have seen our Rahab broken, our sins overthrown, and we cannot but unite in the ascription of praise unto the Lord. Thou hast scattered thine enemies with thy strong arm. Thy strength has strewn thy foes dead upon the plain, or compelled them to flee hither and thither in dismay. Jehovah has overthrown his enemies with his own right arm, unaided and alone. Proud Rahab, swelling in her fury like the sea, was utterly broken and scattered before the Lord of Hosts.

**Verse 11.** *The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine.* All things are alike God's--rebellious earth as well as adoring heaven. Let us not despair of the kingdom of truth; the Lord has not abdicated the throne of earth or handed it over to the sway of Satan. As for the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them. The habitable and cultivated earth, with all its produce, owns the Lord to be both



its Creator and Sustainer, builder and upholder.

**Verse 12.** *The north and the south thou hast created them.* North and south, opposite poles, agree in this--that Jehovah fashioned them. Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name, that is to say, east and west are equally formed by thee, and therefore give thee praise. Turn to all points of the compass, and behold the Lord is there. The regions of snow and the gardens of the sun are his dominions: both the land of the dawning and the home of the setting sun rejoice to own his sway. Tabor was on the west of Jordan and Hermon on the east, and it seems natural to consider these two mountains as representatives of the east and west. Keble paraphrases the passage thus:

"Both Heman moist, and Tabor lone,  
They wait on thee with glad acclaim."

**Verse 13.** *Thou hast a mighty arm,* omnipotence is thine in smiting or uplifting; strong is thy hand, thy power to create and grasp is beyond conception great; and high is thy right hand --thy skill is incomparable, thy favour ennobling, thy working glorious. The power of God so impressed the Psalmist that in many ways he repeated the same thought: and indeed the truth of God's omnipotence is so full of refreshment to gracious hearts that it cannot be too much dwelt upon, especially when viewed in connection with his mercy and truth, as in the following verse.

**Verse 14.** *Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne.* They are the basis of the divine government, the sphere within which his sovereignty moves. God as a sovereign is never unjust or unwise. He is too holy to be unrighteous, too wise to be mistaken; this is constant matter for joy to the upright in heart. Mercy and truth shall

go before thy face. They are the harbingers and heralds of the Lord; he calls these to the front to deal with guilty and changeful man; he makes them, in the person of the Lord Jesus, to be his ambassadors, and so poor, guilty man is enabled to endure the presence of his righteous Lord. If mercy had not paved the way, the coming of God to any man must have been swift destruction. Thus has the poet sung the glories of the covenant God. It was meet that before he poured forth his lament he should record his praise, lest his sorrow should seem to have withered his faith. Before we argue our case before the Lord it is most becoming to acknowledge that we know him to be supremely great and good, whatever may be the appearance of his providence; this is such a course as every wise man will take who desires to have an answer of peace in the day of trouble.

**Verse 15.** *Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound.* It is a blessed God of whom the Psalmist has been singing, and therefore they are a blessed people who partake of his bounty, and know how to exult in his favour. Praise is a peculiarly joyful sound, and blessed are those who are familiar with its strains. The covenant promises have also a sound beyond measure precious, and they are highly favoured who understand their meaning and recognise their own personal interest in them. There may also be a reference here to the blowing of trumpets and other glad noises which attended the worship of Jehovah, who, unlike the gods of the heathen was not adored by the shrieks of wretched victims, or the yells and outcries of terror stricken crowds, but by the joyful shouts of his happy people. They shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance. For them it is joy enough that Jehovah is favourable to them; all day long this contents them and enables them with rigour to pursue their pilgrimage. Only a covenant God could look with favour upon men, and those who have known him in that relationship learn to rejoice in him, yea, to walk with him in fellowship, and to continue in

communion with him. If we give God our ear and hear the joyful sound, he will shew us his face and make us glad. While the sun shines, men walk without stumbling as to their feet, and when the Lord smiles on us we live without grief as to our souls.

**Verse 16.** *In thy name shall they rejoice all the day.* And good cause they have for so doing, for to the soul which, in Christ Jesus, has entered into covenant with God, every attribute is a fountain of delight. There is no hour in the day, and no day in our life, in which we may not rejoice in the name, person, and character of the Lord. We need no other reason for rejoicing. As philosophers could make merry without music, so can we rejoice without carnal comforts; the Lord All sufficient is an all sufficient source of joy. And in thy righteousness shall they be exalted. By the Lord's righteous dealings the saints are uplifted in due time, however great may have been the oppression and the depression from which they may have suffered. In the righteousness which the covenant supplies, which is entirely of the Lord, believers are set on high in a secure and blessed position, so that they are full of sacred happiness. If God were unjust, or if he regarded us as being without righteousness, we must be filled with misery, but as neither of these things are so, we are exalted indeed, and would extol the name of the Lord.

**Verse 17.** *For thou art the glory of their strength.* Surely in the Lord Jehovah have we both righteousness and strength. He is our beauty and glory when we are strong in him, as well as our comfort and sustenance when we tremble because of conscious weakness in ourselves. No man whom the Lord makes strong may dare to glory in himself, he must ascribe all honour to the Lord alone; we have neither strength nor beauty apart from him. And in thy favour our horn shall be exalted. By the use of the word our the Psalmist identifies himself with the blessed people, and this indicates how

much sweeter it is to sing in the first person than concerning others. May we have grace to claim a place among those in covenant with God, in Christ Jesus, for then a sense of divine favour will make us also bold and joyous. A creature full of strength and courage lifts up its horn, and so also does a believer become potent, valiant, and daring. The horn was an eastern ornament, worn by men and women, or at least is so at this day, and by the uplifting of this the wearer showed himself to be in good spirits, and in a confident frame of mind: we wear no such outward vanities, but our inward soul is adorned and made bravely triumphant when the favour of God is felt by us. Worldly men need outward prosperity to make them lift up their heads, but the saints find more than enough encouragement in the secret love of God.

**Verse 18.** *For the Lord is our defence.* Whoever else may defend us, he is our ultimate Defender and Shield. And the Holy one of Israel is our king. He who protects should govern, our defender should be acknowledged as our king. Kings are called the shields of nations, and the God of Israel is both our Ruler and our Defence. Another sense may be that Israel's defender and king was of the Lord, belonging to him and sent by him; even the protectors of the land being themselves protected by the Lord. The title "the Holy One of Israel" is peculiarly delightful to the renewed heart. God is one, we worship none beside. He is holiness itself, the only being who can be called "the Holy One", and in his perfection of character we see the most excellent reason for our faith. He who is holy cannot break his promises, or act unjustly concerning his oath and covenant. Moreover, he is the Holy One *of Israel*, being specially the God of his own elect, ours by peculiar ties, ours for ever and ever. Who among the saints will not rejoice in the God of election? Are they not indeed a people greatly blessed who can call this God their God for ever and ever?

**Verse 19.** *Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one.* The Psalmist returns to a consideration of the covenant made with David. The holy one here meant may be either David or Nathan the prophet, but most probably the latter, for it was to him that the word of the Lord came by night. 2Sa 7:4-5. God condescends to employ his gracious ministers to be the means of communication between himself and his favoured ones, --even to King David the covenant was revealed by Nathan the prophet; thus the Lord puts honour upon his ministers. I have laid help upon one that is mighty. The Lord had made David a mighty man of valour, and now he covenants to make him the helper and defender of the Jewish state. In a far fuller sense the Lord Jesus is essentially and immeasurably mighty, and on him the salvation of his people rests by divine appointment, while his success is secured by divine strength being engaged to be with him. Let us lay our faith where God has laid our help. I have exalted one chosen out of the people. David was God's elect, elect out of the people, as one of themselves, and elect to the highest position in the state. In his extraction, election, and exaltation, he was an eminent type of the Lord Jesus, who is the man of the people, the chosen of God, and the king of his church. Whom God exalts let us exalt. Woe unto those who despise him, they are guilty of contempt of court before the Lord of Hosts, as well as of rejecting the Son of God.

**Verse 20.** *I have found David my servant.* David was discovered by the Lord among the sheepfolds and recognised as a man of gracious spirit, full of faith and courage, and therefore fit to be leader in Israel. With my holy oil have I anointed him. By the hand of Samuel, David was anointed to be king long before he ascended the throne. The verse must also be expounded of the Prince Emmanuel; he became the servant of the Lord for our sakes, the Father having found for us in his person a mighty deliverer, therefore upon him

rested the Spirit without measure, to qualify him for all the offices of love to which he was set apart. We have not a Saviour self appointed and unqualified, but one sent of God and divinely endowed for his work. Our Saviour Jesus is also the Lord's Christ, or anointed. The oil with which he is anointed is God's own oil, and holy oil; he is divinely endowed with the Spirit of holiness.

**Verse 21.** *With whom my hand shall be established*, or, "with whom my hand shall ever be present." The almightiness of God abides permanently with Jesus in his work as Redeemer and Ruler of his people. Mine arm also shall strengthen him. The fulness of divine power shall attend him. This covenant promise ought to be urged in prayer before the Lord, for the great lack of the church at this time is power. We have everything except the divine energy, and we must never rest content until we see it in full operation among us. Jesus must be among us, and then there will be no lack of force in any of our church agencies.

**Verse 22.** *The enemy shall not exact upon him*; he shall not be vexed and persecuted as a helpless debtor by an extortionate creditor. Nor the son of wickedness afflict him. Graceless men shall no longer make his life a burden. David had in his earlier history been hunted by Saul like a partridge on the mountains, and though he had striven in all things to act justly towards Saul, because he was the Lord's anointed, yet Saul was never content with his displays of loyalty, but persecuted him relentlessly. The covenant, therefore, engaged that his life of hardship and oppression should come to an end for ever; it did so in David's own person, and more remarkably still in the life of Solomon his son. Who does not in all this see a type of the Lord Jesus, who though he was once seized for our debts, and also evil entreated by the ungodly, is now so exalted that he can never be exacted upon any more, neither can the fiercest of his

enemies vex him again. No Judas can now betray him to death, no Pilate can deliver him to be crucified. Satan cannot tempt him, and our sins cannot burden him.

**Verse 23.** *And I will beat down his foes before his face* --crushing them and their plans. God himself thus fights the battles of his Son, and effectually overturns his foes. And plague them that hate him, or *smite his haters*. May none of us learn the terror of this threatening, which is surely being fulfilled upon all those unbelievers who have rejected the Son of God, and died in the hardness of their hearts. The prophecy is also having another fulfilment in the overthrow of systems of error, and the vexation caused to their promoters. There is no such plague to bad men as the prosperity of the cause of Jesus.

**Verse 24.** *But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him.* These were the two attributes of which the Psalmist began to sing in Ps 89:1, doubtless because he saw them to be most prominent in the covenant which he was about to plead with God. To David and his seed, God was gracious and faithful, and though through their sin the literal kingdom lost all its glory and the dynasty became obscure, yet the line remained unbroken and more than all its former glory was restored by the enthronisation of Him who is Prince of the kings of the earth, with whom the Lord's mercy and faithfulness remain for ever. All who are in Jesus should rejoice, for they shall prove in their own experience the faithful mercy of the Lord. And in my name shall his horn be exalted. Gloriously does the Lord Jesus lift up his head, raised to the highest place of honour by the mandate of the Father. David and Solomon in their dignity were but faint types of the Lord Jesus, who is far above all principalities and powers. The fullest exaltation of the horn of Jesus is yet to come in that millennial period which is hastening on.

**Verse 25.** *I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers.* He shall reach far beyond the little rivers which stand for boundaries in Palestine; he shall by his power embrace all lands from sea to sea. He shall have his hand in the ocean and his right hand in earth's mightiest streams. As monarchs hold in their hands a globe to set forth their dominion over the earth, he shall grasp the far more unconquerable sea, and be Lord of all. This power is to be given him of the Lord, and is to be abiding; so we understand the words "*I will set.*" The verse has in it a voice of good cheer concerning sailors, and all dwellers on the waters; the hand of Jesus is over them, and as he found his first apostles by the sea, so we trust he still finds earnest disciples there.

**Verse 27.** *Also I will make him my firstborn.* Among the kings the seed of David were to be most favoured and indulged with most love and paternal regard from God: but in Jesus we see this in the highest degree verified, for he has preeminence in all things, inasmuch as by inheritance he has a more glorious name than any other, and is higher than the kings of the earth. Who can rival heaven's Firstborn? The double portion and the government belong to him. Kings are honoured when they honour him, and those who honour him are kings! In the millennial glory it shall be seen what the covenant stores up for the once despised Son of David, but even now faith sees him exalted as King of kings and Lord of lords. Lo, we bow before thee, thou Heir of all things! Our sheaves do obeisance to thy sheaf. All thy mother's children call thee blessed. Thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise. Jesus is no servant of princes, nor would he have his bride, the church, degrade herself by bowing before kings and eating the bread of a pensioner at their hands. He and his kingdom are higher than the kings of the earth. Let the great ones of the earth be wise and submit to him, for he is Lord, and he is the governor among the nations.



**Verse 28.** *My mercy will I keep for him for evermore.* The kings of David's line needed mercy, and mercy prevented their house from utterly perishing until the Son of Mary came. He needs no mercy for himself, but he is a representative man, and the mercy of God is required for those who are in him: for such mercy is kept for ever. And my covenant shall stand fast with him. With Jesus the covenant is ratified both by blood of sacrifice and by oath of God, it cannot be cancelled or altered, but is an eternal verity, resting upon the veracity of one who cannot lie. What exultation fills our hearts as we see that the covenant of grace is *sure* to all the seed, because it stands fast with him with whom we are indissolubly united.

**Verse 29.** *His seed also will I make to endure for ever.* David's seed lives on in the person of the Lord Jesus, and the seed of Jesus in the persons of believers. Saints are a race that neither death nor life can kill. Rome and its priests, with their inquisition and other infernal cruelties, have laboured to exterminate the covenant seed, but "vain is their rage, their efforts vain." As long as God lives, his people must live. And his throne, as the days of heaven. Jesus reigns on, and will reign till the skies shall fall, yea, and when the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, his throne shall stand. What a blessed covenant is this! Some commentators talk of conditions, but we fail to see any; the promises are as absolute as they can possibly be, and if any conditions as to the conduct of the favoured individuals can be conceived, they are disposed of in the succeeding verses.

**Verse 30.** *If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments.* It was possible, terribly possible, that David's posterity might wander from the Lord; indeed they did so, but what then? Was the mercy of God to pass away from David's seed? --far from it. So,

too, the seed of the Son of David are apt to start aside, but are they therefore cast away? Not a single word gives liberty for such an idea, but the very reverse. Expositors in their fear of Calvinistic doctrine shake off the fear of adding to the word of God, or else they would not have spent their time in talking about "the conditions" of this absolutely unconditional covenant.

**Verse 31.** *If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments.* The dreadful "if" is suggested again, and the sad case is stated in other forms. But if it should be so, what then? Death and rejection? Ah, no; Blessed be God, No! If their sin be negative or positive, if it be forsaking or profanation; if either judgments or commandments or both be violated, yet there is not a word as to final destruction, but the very reverse. Legalism will import its ifs, but the Lord slays the ifs as fast as they rise. Eternal shalls and wills make glorious havoc among the ifs and buts.

**Verse 32.** *Then will I visit their transgressions with the rod.* Not with the sword, not with death and destruction; but still with a smarting, tingling, painful rod. Saints must smart if they sin: God will see to that. He hates sin too much not to visit it, and he loves his saints too well not to chasten them. God never plays with his rod, he lays it well home to his children, he *visits* them with it in their houses, bodies, and hearts, and makes them know that he is grieved with their ways. He smites home and chastens their iniquity with stripes, which are either many or few in proportion as the heart is properly affected by them. The rod is a covenant blessing, and is meant to be used. As sin is so frequent, the rod never rests long together; in God's family the rod is not spared, or the children would be spoiled.

**Verse 33.** *Nevertheless.* And a glorious nevertheless too!

*Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him.* O glorious fear killing sentence! This crowns the covenant with exceeding glory. Mercy may seem to depart from the Lord's chosen, but it shall never altogether do so. Jesus still enjoys the divine favour, and we are in him, and therefore under the most trying circumstances the Lord's lovingkindness to each one of his chosen will endure the strain. If the covenant could be made void by our sins it would have been void long ere this; and if renewed its tenure would not be worth an hour's purchase if it had remained dependent upon us. God may leave his people, and they may thereby suffer much and fall very low, but utterly and altogether he never can remove his love from them; for that would be to cast a reflection upon his own truth, and this he will never allow, for he adds, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. Man fails in all points, but God in none. To be faithful is one of the eternal characteristics of God, in which he always places a great part of his glory: his truth is one of his peculiar treasures and crown jewels, and he will never endure that it should be tarnished in any degree. This passage sweetly assures us that the heirs of glory shall not be utterly cast off. Let those deny the safety of the saints who choose to do so, we have not so learned Christ. We believe in the gospel rod, but not in the penal sword for the adopted sons.

**Verse 34.** *My covenant will I not break.* It is his own covenant. He devised it, drew up the draft of it, and voluntarily entered into it: he therefore thinks much of it. It is not a man's covenant, but the Lord claims it as his own. It is an evil thing among men for one to be a "covenant breaker", and such an opprobrious epithet shall never be applicable to the Most High. Nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Alterations and afterthoughts belong to short sighted beings who meet with unexpected events which operate upon them to change their minds, but the Lord who sees everything from the

beginning has no such reason for shifting his ground. He is besides immutable in his nature and designs, and cannot change in heart, and therefore not in promise. A word once given is sacred; once let a promise pass our lips and honesty forbids that we should recall it, -- unless indeed the thing promised be impossible, or wicked, neither of which can happen with the promises of God. How consoling it is to see the Lord thus resolute. He, in the words before us, virtually reasserts his covenant and rehearses his engagements. This he does at such length, and with such reiteration, that it is evident he takes pleasure in that most ancient and solemn contract. If it were conceivable that he had repented of it, he would not be found dwelling upon it, and repeating it with renewed emphasis.

**Verse 35.** *Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David.* Because he could swear by no greater he swore by himself, and by that peculiar attribute which is his highest glory, being the subject of threefold adoration by all the hosts of heaven. God here pledges the crown of his kingdom, the excellent beauty of his person, the essence of his nature. He does as good as say that if he ceases to be true to his covenant he will have forfeited his holy character. What more can he say? In what stronger language can he express his unalterable adherence to the truth of his promise? An oath is the end of all strife; it ought to be the end of all doubt on our part. We cannot imagine that God could lie, yet he puts it so--that if the covenant were not kept by him, he would regard it as a lie. Here is ground for strong confidence; may our faith be of such a nature as these assurances will warrant.

**Verse 36.** *His seed shall endure for ever.* David's line in the person of Jesus is an endless one, and the race of Jesus, as represented in successive generations of believers, shows no sign of failure. No power, human or Satanic, can break the Christian succession; as

saints die others shall rise up to fill their places, so that till the last day, the day of doom, Jesus shall have a seed to serve him. And his throne as the sun before me. In our Lord Jesus the dynasty of David remains upon the throne. Jesus has never abdicated, nor gone into banishment. He reigns, and must reign so long as the sun continues to shine upon the earth. A seed and a throne are the two great promises of the covenant, and they are as important to us as to our Lord Jesus himself; for we are the seed who must endure for ever, and we are protected and ennobled by that King whose royalties are to last for ever.

**Verse 37.** *It shall be established for ever as the moon.* The kingdom may wax and wane to mortal eyes, but it shall still abide as long as the moon walks in her silver beauty. And as a faithful witness in heavens. The most stable part of the universe is selected as a type of Messiah's kingdom, and both sun and moon are made to be symbols of its long endurance. Whatever else there is in the sky which faithfully witnesses to the unbending course of nature is also called upon to be a sign of the Lord's truth. When heaven and earth witness, and the Lord himself swears, there remains no excuse for doubting, and faith joyfully reposes in confident expectation.

**Verse 38.** *But thou hast cast off and abhorred.* The Lord had promised not to cast off the seed of David, and yet it looked as if he had done so, and that too in the most angry manner, as if he loathed the person of the king. God's actions may appear to us to be the reverse of his promises, and then our best course is to come before him in prayer and put the matter before him just as it strikes our apprehension. We are allowed to do this, for this holy and inspired man did so unrebuked, but we must do it humbly and in faith. Thou hast been wroth with thine anointed. He deserved the wrath, doubtless, but the Psalmist's point is, that this appeared to him to

conflict with the gracious covenant. He puts the matter plainly, and makes bold with the Lord, and the Lord loves to have his servants so do; it shows that they believe his engagements to be matters of fact.

**Verse 39.** *Thou hast made void the covenant of thy servant.* The dispensations of providence looked as if there had been a disannulling of the sacred compact, though indeed it was not so. Thou hast profaned his crown by casting it to the ground. The king had been subject to such sorrow and shame that his diadem had been as it were taken from his head, dashed on the earth, and rolled in the mire. He was a theocratic monarch, and the Lord, who gave him his crown, took it from him and treated it with contempt, --at least so it seemed. In these sad days also we may utter the same complaint, for Jesus is not acknowledged in many of the churches, and usurpers have profaned his crown. When we hear of kings and queens set up as "heads of the church", and a priest styled "The Vicar of Christ", while parliaments and courts take upon themselves to legislate for the church of God, we may bitterly lament that things should come to so wretched a pass. Few are there who will acknowledge the crown rights of King Jesus, the very subject is considered to be out of date. O Lord how long!

**Verse 40.** *Thou hast broken down all his hedges.* He was no longer sheltered from the slanderous assaults of contemptuous tongues; the awe which should guard the royal name had ceased to separate him from his fellows. The "divinity which doth hedge a king" had departed. Hitherto, the royal family had been like a vine within an enclosure, but the wall was now laid low, and the vine was unprotected. It is sorrowfully true that in many places the enclosures of the church have been destroyed, the line of demarcation between the church and the world has almost vanished, and godless men fill the sacred offices. Alas, O Lord God, shall it be always so? Shall thy

true vine be deserted by thee, thou great Husbandman? Set up the boundaries again, and keep thy church as a vineyard reserved for thyself. Thou hast brought his strong holds to ruin. The forts of the land were in the possession of the enemy and were dismantled, the defences of the kingdom were overthrown. Thus has it happened that precious truths, which were the bulwarks of the church, have been assailed by heresy, and the citadels of sound doctrine have been abandoned to the foe. O God, how canst thou suffer this? As the God of truth, wilt thou not arise and tread down falsehood?

**Verse 41.** *All that pass by the way spoil him.* Idle passers by, who have nothing else to do, must needs have a pluck at this vine, and they do it without difficulty, since the hedges are gone. Woe is the day when every petty reasoner has an argument against religion, and men in their cups are fluent with objections against the gospel of Jesus. Although Jesus on the cross is nothing to them, and they pass him by without inquiring into what he has done for them, yet they can loiter as long as you will, if there be but the hope of driving another nail into his hands and helping to crucify the Lord afresh. They will not touch him with the finger of faith, but they pluck at him with the hand of malice. He is a reproach to his neighbours. David's successors had unneighbourly neighbours, who were a reproach to good fellowship, because they were so ready to reproach their neighbour. The Jews were much taunted by the surrounding Gentiles when at any time they fell into trouble. At this time the people of God, who follow the Lord fully, are subject to a thousand reproaches, and some of them of the most bitter kind. These reproaches are really the reproach of Christ, and, at bottom, are meant for him. Shall it always be so? Shall he, who deserves to be universally adored, be subject to general scorn? Where, then, O God, is thy faithfulness to thy covenant?

**Verse 42.** *Thou hast set up the right hand of thy adversaries.* Thou hast done it, *thou*, who hast sworn to give him help and victory, thou hast, instead thereof, sided with his enemies, and lent them thy strength, so that they have gained the supremacy. Thou hast made all his enemies to rejoice. They are boasting over him, and are glorying in his defeat, and this is done by thyself. O God, --how is this? Where is the covenant? Hast thou forgotten thine own pledges and promises?

**Verse 43.** *Also turned the edge of his sword.* When he goes to war he is as unsuccessful as though his sword refused to cut, and gave way like a sword of lead. His weapons fail him. And hast not made him to stand in the battle. His heart fails him as well as his sword--he wavers, he falls. This has happened even to naturally brave men--a terrible dread has unmanned them. At this present the church has few swords of true Jerusalem metal; her sons are pliable, her ministers yield to pressure. We need men whose edge cannot be turned, firm for truth, keen against error, sharp towards sin, cutting their way into men's hearts. Courage and decision are more needed now than ever, for charity towards heresy is the fashionable vice, and indifference to all truth, under the name of liberal mindedness, is the crowning virtue of the age. The Lord send us men of the school of Elias, or, at least, of Luther and Knox.

**Verse 44.** *Thou hast made his glory to cease.* The brightness of his reign and the prosperity of his house are gone, his fame is tarnished, his honour disgraced. And cast his throne down to the ground. He has lost his power to govern at home or to conquer abroad. This happened to kings of David's line, and, more grievous to tell, it is happening in these days to the visible kingdom of the Lord Jesus. Where are the glories of Pentecost? Where is the majesty of the Reformation? Where does his kingdom come among the sons of



men? Woe is unto us, for the glory has departed, and the gospel throne of Jesus is hidden from our eyes!

**Verse 45.** *The days of his youth hast thou shortened.* The time of the king's energy was brief, he grew feeble before his time. Thou hast covered him with shame. Shame was heaped upon him because of his premature decay and his failure in arms. This was very grievous to the writer of this Psalm, who was evidently a most loyal adherent of the house of David. In this our day we have to bemoan the lack of vigour in religion--the heroic days of Christianity are over, her raven locks are sprinkled with untimely grey. Is this according to the covenant? Can this be as the Lord has promised? Let us plead with the righteous Judge of all the earth, and beseech him to fulfil his word wherein he has promised that those who wait upon him shall renew their strength. Selah. The interceding poet takes breath amid his lament, and then turns from describing the sorrows of the kingdom to pleading with the Lord.

**Verse 46.** *How long, Lord?* The appeal is to Jehovah, and the argument is the length of the affliction endured. Chastisement with a rod is not a lengthened matter, therefore he appeals to God to cut short the time of tribulation. Wilt thou hide thyself for ever? Hast thou not promised to appear for thy servant--wilt thou then for ever forsake him? Shall thy wrath burn like fire? Shall it go on and on evermore till it utterly consume its object? Be pleased to set a bound! How far wilt thou go? Wilt thou burn up the throne which thou hast sworn to perpetuate? Even thus we would entreat the Lord to remember the cause of Christ in these days. Can he be so angry with his church as to leave her much longer? How far will he suffer things to go? Shall truth die out, and saints exist no more? How long will he leave matters to take their course? Surely he must interpose soon, for, if he do not, true religion will be utterly consumed, as it were,

with fire.

**Verse 47.** *Remember how short my time is.* If so brief, do not make it altogether bitter. If thine anger burn on it will outlast this mortal life, and then there will be no time for thy mercy to restore me. Some expositors ascribe these words, and all the preceding verses, to the state of the Lord Jesus in the days of his humiliation, and this gives an instructive meaning; but we prefer to continue our reference all through to the church, which is the seed of the Lord Jesus, even as the succeeding kings were the seed of David. We, having transgressed, are made to feel the rod, but we pray the Lord not to continue his stripes lest our whole life be passed in misery. Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain? If the Lord do not shine upon his work we live for nothing--we count it no longer life if his cause does not prosper. We live if the King lives, but not else. Everything is vanity if religion be vanity. If the kingdom of heaven should fail, everything is a failure. Creation is a blot, providence an error, and our own existence a bell, if the faithfulness of God can fail and his covenant of grace can be dissolved. If the gospel system can be disproved, nothing remains for us or any other of the sons of men, which can render existence worth the having.

**Verse 48.** *What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death?* All must die. None of our race can answer to the question here propounded except in the negative; there is none that can claim to elude the arrows of death. Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? Neither by strength, wisdom, nor virtue can any man escape the common doom, for to the dust return we must. Since then we must all die, do not make this life all wretchedness, by smiting us so long, O Lord. Thy Son our covenant Head died, and so also shall we; let us not be so deserted of thee in this brief span that we shall be quite unable to testify to thy faithfulness: make us not feel that we

have lived in vain. Thus the brevity of life and the certainty of death are turned into pleas with the Most High. Selah. Here we rest again, and proceed to further pleadings.

**Verse 49.** *Lord, where are thy former loving kindnesses, which thou swarest unto David in thy truth?* Here he comes to grand pleading, hand to hand work with the covenant angel. We may remind the Lord of his first deeds of love, his former love to his church, his former favour 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. When things look black we may bring forth our strong reasons, and debate the case with our condescending God, who has himself said, "Come now, and let us reason together."

**Verse 50.** *Remember, Lord, the reproach of thy servants.* By reason of their great troubles they were made a mock of by ungodly men, and hence the Lord's pity is entreated. Will a father stand by and see his children insulted? The Psalmist entreats the Lord to compassionate the wretchedness brought upon his servants by the taunts of their adversaries, who jested at them on account of their sufferings. How I do bear in my bosom the reproach of all the mighty people. The Psalmist himself laid the scorn of the great and the proud to heart. He felt as if all the reproaches which vexed his nation were centred in himself, and therefore in sacred sympathy with the people he poured out his heart. We ought to weep with those that weep; reproach brought upon the saints and their cause ought to burden us: if we can hear Christ blasphemed, and see his servants insulted, and remain unmoved, we have not the true Israelite's spirit. Our grief at the griefs of the Lord's people may be pleaded in prayer, and it will be acceptable argument. 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 Ps 77:1-20. 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, but must abide in death.

**Verse 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; therefore we cry for the Lord's interposition. When Jehovah's own name is in the quarrel, surely he will arise. Wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of thine anointed. Tracking him and finding occasion to blaspheme at every turn; 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 oft repeated sarcasm --"Where is the promise of his coming?" Is the reproach aimed at the delays of the Messiah, those long expected footfalls which as yet are unheard? O Lord, how long shall this threadbare taunt continue? How long? How long?

"Come, for creation groans  
Impatient of thy stay,  
Worn out with these long years of ill,  
These ages of delay."  
"Come, in thy glorious might,  
Come with the iron rod,  
Scattering thy foes before thy face,

Most Mighty Son of God."

**Verse 52.** *Blessed be the Lord for evermore.* He ends where he began; he has sailed round the world and reached port again. 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, for ever, our blessed God. Amen, and Amen. All our hearts say so. So be it, Lord, we wish it over and over again. Be thou blessed evermore.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS

**Whole Psalm.** The present Psalm makes a pair with the preceding one. It is a spiritual Allegro to that Penseroso...That Psalm was a dirge of Passion Tide, this Psalm is a carol of Christmas. -- *Christopher Wordsworth.*

**Whole Psalm.** There are many passages in this Psalm which do clearly evidence that it is to be interpreted of Christ; yea, there are many things in this Psalm that can never be clearly, pertinently, and appositely applied to any but Jesus Christ. For a taste, see Ps 89:19 "*I have laid help upon one that is mighty*", mighty to pardon, reconcile, to justify, to save, to bring to glory; suitable to that of the Apostle, Heb 7:25, "He is able to save to the uttermost" --that is, to all ends and purposes, perfectly, completely, fully, continually, perpetually.

Christ is a thorough Saviour, a mighty Saviour: Isa 63:1, "Mighty to save." There needs none to come after him to finish the work which he hath begun: Ps 89:19, *I have exalted one chosen out of the people*, which is the very title given to our Lord Jesus: Isa 62:1, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect", or chosen one, "in whom my soul delighteth": Ps 89:20, *I have fouled David my servant*. Christ is very frequently called by that name, as being most dearly beloved of God, and most highly esteemed and valued by God, and as being typified by him both as king and prophet of his church: Ps 89:20, *With my holy oil have I anointed him*; suitable to that of Christ; Lu 4:18, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor"; and therefore we need not doubt of the excellency, authority, certainty, and sufficiency of the gospel: Ps 89:27, *I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth*. Christ is the firstborn of every creature, and in all things hath the preeminence: Ps 89:29, *His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven*. This is chiefly spoken of Christ and his kingdom. The aspectable heaven is corruptible, but the kingdom of heaven is eternal; and such shall be Christ's seed, throne and kingdom: Ps 89:36, *His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me*. "Christ shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand", Isa 53:10. *And his throne as the sun before me*; that is, perpetual and glorious, as the Chaldee explains it, *shall shine as the sun*. Other kingdoms and thrones have their times and their turns, their rise and their ruins, but so hath not the kingdom and throne of Jesus Christ. Christ's dominion is "an everlasting dominion", which shall not pass away; "and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed", Da 7:13-14. I might give further instances out of this Psalm, but enough is as good as a feast. New saith God, "I have made a covenant with him; "so then there is a covenant that God the Father hath made with Christ the Mediator; which covenant,

the Father engages to the Son, shall stand fast, there shall be no cancelling or disannulling of it. God the Father hath not only made a covenant of grace with the saints in Christ, but he has also made a covenant of redemption, as we call it for distinction sake, with Jesus Christ himself: "My covenant shall stand fast with him; " that is, with Christ, as we have fully demonstrated. --*Thomas Brooks*.

**Verse 1.** This one short verse contains the summary, pith, and argument of the whole long Psalm; wherein observe *The Song's Ditty, the lovingkindness and truth of the Lord*, manifested unto the whole world generally, to David's house (that is, the church) especially. *The Singer's Duty, magnifying the mercies of God always, even from one generation to another*. And by all means; with his *mouth*, for that is expressed in this verse; with his *mind*, for that is implied in the next--*I have said*, etc., that is, believed in my heart, and therefore spake it with my tongue, Ps 116:10. "For out of the heart's abundance the mouth speaketh", Mt 12:34. --*John Boys*.

**Verse 1.** *I will sing*. It is to be observed that he does not say, I will *speak* of the goodness of the Lord; but, I will sing. The celebration of the divine goodness has joined with itself the joy and exultation of a pious mind, which cannot be poured forth better than in song. That pleasantness and exuberance of a happy spirit, which by singing is instilled into the ears of the listeners, has a certain wonderful power of moving the affections; so that not in vain were pious minds taught by the Holy Spirit to inculcate the wonderful work of God in songs composed for this purpose, to commit them to memory and to appoint them to be sung. --*Musculus*.

**Verse 1.** *I will sing*. The Psalmist has a very sad complaint to make of the deplorable condition of the family of David at this time, and yet he begins the Psalm with songs of praise; for we must in every

thing, in every state, give thanks. We think when we are in trouble we get ease by complaining: but we do more, we get joy, by praising. Let our complaints therefore be turned into thanksgiving; and in these verses we find that which will be in matter of praise and thanksgiving for us in the worst of times, whether upon a personal or public account. --*Matthew Henry*.

**Verse 1.** *Sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever.* S. Gregory the Great raises the question here as to how a perpetual singing of the mercies of God is compatible with unalloyed bliss in heaven, inasmuch as the thought of mercy connotes the memory of sin and sorrow, which needed mercy, whereas Isaiah saith that "the former troubles are forgotten", and "the former things shall not be remembered, nor come upon the heart" (Isa 65:16-17). And he replies that it will be like the memory of past sickness in time of health, without stain, without grief, and serving only to heighten the felicity of the redeemed, by the contrast with the past, and to increase their love and gratitude towards God. And so sings the Cluniac: (Bernard of Clairvaux.)

"Their breasts are filled with gladness,  
Their mouths are tuned to praise,  
What time, now safe for ever,  
On former sins they gaze:  
The fouler was the error,  
The sadder was the fall,  
The ampler are the praises  
Of him who pardoned all."

Note, too, that he says, "with *my* mouth", not with that of any deputy; *I will make known*, not secretly or timidly, not in a whisper, but boldly preach, *Thy faithfulness*, or *truth*, not my own opinion, far



less my own falsehood, but Thy Truth, which is, Thine Only begotten Son. --*Gregory, Bernard, Hugo, and Augustine: quoted by Neale and Littledale.*

**Verse 1.** *Mercies.* The word may be rendered *graces, kindnesses, goodnesses*, and designs the abundance of grace. --*John Gill.*

**Verse 1.** *The mercies.* His manifold and sundry mercies: as if he should say, we have tasted of more than one, yea, we have felt all his mercies; I will therefore praise the same for ever. I will sing his mercy for creating this universe, which is *macrocosmos*, a great world; and for making man, which is *microcosmos*, a little world.

1. My song shall set forth his kindness, for that he gave me being.
2. For adding to my being, life, which he denieth unto stones.
3. To life, sense, which he denieth unto plants.
4. To sense, speech and understanding, which he denieth unto brute beasts...

I am exceeding much bound unto God for creating me when I was not; and for preserving me under his wings ever since I was: yet I am more bound to his mercy for redeeming me, for blessing me with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ his Son (Eph 1:1-23 3:1-21), for his electing of me, for his calling of me, for his justifying of me, for his sanctifying of me. These graces are the riches of his goodness and glory, *misericordioe in oeternum*, everlasting mercies, as reaching from everlasting predestination to everlasting glorification. O Lord, I will always sing thy *mercies* in promising, and ever shew thy *truth* in performing thy promise made to David, thy

chosen servant, concerning thy Son, my Saviour, saying, "Thy seed will I establish for ever." So the fathers expound our text: I will ever sing thy mercies, in vouchsafing to send thy Son to visit thy servants, sick to death in sin. First, I will ever sing of thy mercifulness, and then will ever be shewing thy faithfulness. *Neque enim exhiberetur veritas in impletione promissorum nisi procederet misericordia in remissione peccatorum.* (For truth, in the fulfilment of the promises, would not be shown forth; unless mercy, in the forgiveness of sins, should precede it.) And what is God's mercy set up for ever, and his truth established in the heavens, but that which Isaiah terms, "the sure mercies of David": that is, as Paul construes Isaiah, the holy promise made to David and the promise made to David, is briefly this, "Thy seed will I establish for ever, and set up thy throne from generation to generation." --*John Boys.*

**Verse 1.** *For ever.* I know some join *in oeternum* to the noun *miser cordias*, and not to the verb *cantabo*, making the sense to be this: I will always sing thy mercies which endure for ever. But *always* is referred as well, if not better, unto the verb, *I will sing*: as who would say, Lord, thy mercies are so manifest, and so manifold, so great in their number, and so good in their nature, that I will always, so long as I have any being, sing praises unto thee Haply some will object, "All flesh is grass, and the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth", (Isa 40:6-7). David being persecuted by Saul, said, "There is but a step between me and death", (1Sa 20:3). Nay, David, thy life is shorter than a stride, but "a span long", as thyself witnesseth, Ps 39:5. How can he then that begs his bread but for a day promise to spend his breath in magnifying the Lord for ever? Answer is made, that the prophet will not only commend the mercies of the Lord in word, but also commit them unto writing. *Ut sciat hoec oetas, posteritasque legat* (Eobanus Hessus.) (that this age may know, and that posterity may read.) As

the tongue of the prophet is termed elsewhere "the pen of a writer"; so the writing of the Prophet is here termed *his mouth*, as Euthymeus upon the place (Ac 4:25), *Liber Psalmorum os David (The Book of Psalms is the mouth of David)*. He doth intend to note the mercies of God, and to set forth his truth in a book, the which he will leave behind him (as an instrument) to convey the same *from generation to generations*, from the generation of Jews to the generation of Christians. Or from the Old Testament to the New: for the blessed Apostles in their sermons usually cite sentences out of the Psalms. S. Peter telleth us that the gospel was preached unto the dead (1Pe 4:6); so may we say, that the gospel is preached by the dead. For the most ancient fathers, and other judicious authors, who have spent their days in writing learned expositions and godly meditations upon the Holy Scriptures, although they be dead, yet they "sing all the mercies of the Lord, and shew the truth of his word from one generation to another." It is reported in our chronicles of Athelstan, *parum oetati vixit, multum glorioe (he lived but little of time, but much of glory)*. So many zealous and industrious doctors have lived (in respect of their age) but a little, yet in respect of their acts, a great while, shining still in their works and writings, as lights of the world. Or the prophet may be said to *sing ever* intentionally, though not actually. For as the wicked, if he could live alway, would sin alway, so the good man (if God should suffer him alway to breathe on earth) would sing alway the mercies of the Lord. --*John Boys*.

**Verse 1.** *With my mouth.* The author has heard continual praises from a tongue half eaten away with cancer. What use, beloved reader, are you making of your tongue? --*Philip Bennett Power*.

**Verse 2.** *I have said.* The word *ytrma*, "*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. --*Samuel Horsley*.

**Verse 2.** *I have said*, etc. The perpetuity of mercy is one eminent piece of this Psalm, for with that he begins: *Mercy shall be built up for ever*, etc. And they are the sure mercies of our spiritual David (Christ), he means. Now, to set forth the perpetuity hereof, he first useth words that express firmitude, as *established, built up for ever*, Ps 89:2,4. Then he uses such similitudes as are taken from things which are held most firm and inviolable amongst men, as Ps 89:4, *foedus incidi*, I have cut or engraven my covenant (so in the Hebrew), alluding to what was then in use, when covenants were mutually to be made, such as they intended to be inviolate, and never to be broken; to signify so much, they did engrave and cut them into the most durable lasting matter, as marble, or brass, or the like. You may see this to have been the way of writing in use, as what was to last for ever: as Job 19:23-24. "Oh, that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!" And what is that rock or marble here? No other than the heart itself of our gracious and most merciful Jehovah, and his most unalterable and immovable purposes, truth and faithfulness. This is that foundation *in the heavens*, whereon mercy is built up for ever, as Ps 89:2, which (as the Apostle says) "remains for ever"; and so they become "the sure mercies of David", Isa 60:3. Again, solemn oaths amongst men serve to ratify and make things sworn to perpetual. This also is there specified as having been taken by God: "Once have I sworn by my holiness", etc., and sworn by him that cannot lie, and sworn to that end, "to show the immutability of his counsel", Heb 6:17. And not only is the immutability of his mercy illustrated by these things taken from what is firm on earth, but he ascends up to the heavens, and

first into the very highest heavens: Ps 89:2, *For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever; thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens:* comparing them to an house built not on earth, or upon a foundation of earth, which thieves break through, and violence destroys, but in heaven, whither they cannot reach. --  
*Thomas Goodwin.*

**Verse 2.** *Mercy shall be built up for ever.* What is this "mercy" that is "built up for ever"? but the glorious and the gracious scheme, the glorious and the gracious fabric, of our salvation, founded in the eternal purpose of God--carried into execution by the labours and the death of Jesus Christ-- and then applied and brought home to the heart by the illuminating and converting power of the Holy Ghost? This is that "mercy" which is "built up for ever." It was planned from everlasting, and will know no ruin or decay, through the illimitable line of eternity itself. Who is the builder of this fabric? Not man's free will. Not man's own righteousness or wisdom. Not human power nor human skill. Every true believer will here join issue with David, that it is God, and God alone, who builds up the temple of his Church; and who, as the builder of it, is alone entitled to all the glory. The elect constitute and form one grand house of mercy: an house, erected to display and to perpetuate the riches of the Father's free grace, of the Son's atoning merit, and of the Holy Ghost's efficacious agency. This house, contrary to the fate of all sublunary buildings, will never fall down, nor ever be taken down. As nothing can be added to it, so nothing can be diminished from it. Fire cannot injure it; storms cannot overthrow it; age cannot impair it. It stands on a rock, and is immovable as the rock on which it stands--the threefold rock of God's inviolable decree, of Christ's finished redemption, and of the Spirit's never failing faithfulness. --*Augustus Montague Toplady, 1740-1778.*

**Verse 2.** *Built up.* Mention of a building of mercy, presupposes miserable ruins, and denotes that this building is intended for the benefit of an elect world ruined by Adam's fall. Free grace and love set on foot this building for them, every stone in which, from the lowest to the highest, is mercy to them; from top to bottom, from the foundation stone to the top stone, all is free and rich mercy to them. And the ground of this glorious building is God's covenant with his chosen: *I have made a covenant with my chosen.* --*Thomas Boston.*

**Verse 2.** *Built up.* Former mercies are fundamental to later ones. The mercies that we enjoy this day are founded upon the mercies of former days, such as we ought joyfully and thankfully to recount with delight and praise; remembering the years of the right hand of the Most High. --*John Howe.*

**Verse 2.** (*last clause*). The meaning of this passage 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. --*R. Warner, 1828.*

**Verse 2.**

For I have said, Thy mercies rise,  
A deathless structure, to the skies:  
The heavens were planted by thy hand,  
And, as the heavens, Thy truth shall stand. --*Richard Mant.*

**Verse 3.** *I have made a covenant with my chosen.* We must ponder here with pious wonder how God has deigned to enter into a covenant with man, the immortal with the mortal, the most powerful with the weakest, the most just with the most unjust, the richest with the poorest, the most blessed with the most wretched. The prophet

wonders that God is mindful of man, and visits the son of man. Of how much greater admiration, I say is it worthy, that they are also joined together, and that not after a simple fashion, but by the ties of a covenant? If man had affirmed this of himself, that God was united and bound to him by a covenant, who is there that would not have condemned him of temerity? Now God himself is introduced affirming this very thing of himself, that he had made a covenant with man. What saint does not see in this thing, how great the filianyrwpia of God is! --*Musculus*.

**Verse 3.** *I have made a covenant with my chosen.* On heaven's side is God himself, the party proposer. Though he was the party offended, yet the motion for a covenant comes from him...The Father of mercies saith, "The lost creatures cannot contract for themselves; and if another undertake not for them, they must perish; they cannot choose an undertaker for themselves. I will choose one for them, and I will make a covenant with my chosen." On man's side is God's chosen, or chosen One, for the word of God is singular; the Son, *the last Adam*. Who else as fit to be undertaker on man's side? Who else could have been the Father's choice for this vast undertaking? No angel nor man was capable of it, but *the Mighty One* (Ps 89:19) whom the Father points out to us as his chosen, Isa 13:1. --*Thomas Boston*.

**Verses 3-4.** I made a covenant with my chosen, etc. Do you suppose that this was spoken to David, in his own person only? No, indeed; but to David as the antitype, figure, and forerunner of Jesus Christ. Hence, the Septuagint version renders it, *I have covenanted* tois eklektois mou *with my elect people*, or with my chosen ones: *i.e.* with them in Christ, and with Christ in their name. *I have sworn unto David my servant*, unto the Messiah, who was typified by David; unto my coeternal Son, who stipulated to take on himself "the form

of a servant"; thy seed, *i.e.* all those whom I have given to thee in the decree of election, all those whom thou shalt live and die to redeem, these *will I establish for ever*, so as to render their salvation irreversible and inadmissible: *and build up thy throne*, thy mediatorial throne, as King of saints and covenant Head of the elect, *to all generations*: there shall always be a succession of favoured sinners to be called and sanctified, in consequence of thy federal obedience unto death; and every period of time shall recompense thy covenant sufferings with an increasing revenue of converted souls, until as many as are ordained to eternal life are gathered in. Observe, here, that when Christ received the promise from the Father concerning the establishment of his (*i.e.* of Christ's) throne to all generations, the plain meaning is, that his people shall be thus established; for, consider Christ in his divine capacity as the Son of God, and his throne was already established, and had been from everlasting, and would have continued to be established without end, even if he had never been incarnate at all. Therefore, the promise imports that Christ shall reign, not simply as a person in the Godhead (which he ever did, ever will, and ever must); but relatively, mediatorially, and in his office character, as the deliverer and king of Zion. Hence it follows, that his people cannot be lost: for he would be a poor sort of a king who had or might have no subjects to reign over. Consequently, that "throne" of glory on which Christ sits is already encircled in part, and will at last be completely surrounded and made still more glorious, by that innumerable company, that general assembly and church of the firstborn who are written in heaven. -- *Augustus Montague Toplady.*

**Verse 5.** *The Heavens*, etc. Now, for this kingdom of his, the heavens are said to praise his wonders, which is spoken of the *angels*, who are often called the heavens, from their place; as in Job it is said, "The heavens are not clean in his sight." And these knowing



the wonders of that covenant of grace, they, even they are said to praise; "The heavens shall praise thy wonders, O Lord" In the Hebrew it is "thy wonder", or "thy miracle", in the singular number, which, in Eph 3:10, the angels are said to adore: and in Lu 2:14, to "sing glory to the Highest"; for his grace to man is that miracle. Now the material heavens do not praise the mercy of God, or the grace of God, or the covenant of grace, or the throne of grace that is established in the heavens. They understand nothing of Christ; no, they do not so much as materially give occasion to man to praise God for these: and therefore this is meant of the angels; and most interpreters understand the next words of them: *Thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints*, angels, and the holy ones made perfect, for there the great congregation is. For even in the heavens, who can be compared to the Lord, where all his angels thus do praise him? *Who among the sons of the mighty*, of all the powers of the earth, *can be likened unto the Lord?* for he is the "King of kings, and he is the Lord of lords; "a God above all gods, even angels themselves, as elsewhere the Psalmist hath it. And he says not only, *There is none like thee;* but, *Who is like unto thee?* his excellency so exceeds. And in Ps 89:7, he is there presented with all his saints and angels round about him, as one that is greatly to be feared, or that is terrible in himself, by reason of his greatness, in this his council and assembly of his saints, and to be had in reverence of all that are about him. For saints and angels, they are of his council in heaven (as might be shewn), and encompass the manifestation of his glory there round about. --*Thomas Goodwin.*

**Verse 5.** Thy wonders, etc. As the heavens are a proof of God's power, in respect of his first framing them out of nothing; so are they a pattern of God's faithfulness, in their constant and orderly motion according to his word since their framing: *The heavens shall praise thy faithfulness also.* However the power and faithfulness of God

may be seen and heard in the work and speech of the heavens by all men, yet are they not observed and hearkened unto except in the Church by God's children: therefore saith he, *They shall praise thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints.* --David Dickson.

**Verse 5.** *Thy wonders.* Thy wondrousness (*literally*, wonder), not "Thy wondrous works", but "Thy wonderful mysterious nature and being", as separate and distinct from all created beings. --J.J.S. Perowne.

**Verse 5.** *Thy wonders*, etc. It is a wonderful salvation, it is such a salvation as the angels desire to pry into it; and it is such a salvation, that all the prophets desire to pry into it; it is almost six thousand years since all the angels in heaven fell into a sea of wonder at this great salvation; it is almost six thousand years since Abel fell into a sea of wonder at this great salvation; and what think ye is his exercise this day? He is even wondering at this great salvation. --Andrew Gray, 1616.

**Verse 6.** *Who in the heaven?* Who in the sky? Ainsworth reads it. In the clouds, *in nubibus, oequabitur*, is to be equalled, saith Calvin, to Jehovah, *Quis enim in superiore nube par oestimetur Jehova.* Who in the higher clouds is equal to Jehovah, so Tremellius reads it. *Who in the heavens?* i.e., say some, in the starry heavens, among the celestial bodies, sun, moon, or stars; which were adored as gods, not only by the Persians, but also by some idolatrous Jews, because of their brightness and beauty, their lustre and glory. Which of all those famous lamps, and heavenly luminaries, is to be compared to the Father of lights, and Sun of righteousness? They may glisten like glowworms in the night of Paganism, among them who are covered with the mantle of darkness, but when this Sun ariseth, and day appeareth, they all vanish and disappear. "Who in the heavens?" i.e.,

say others, in the heaven of heavens, the highest, the third heavens, among the celestial spirits, cherubims and seraphims, angels and archangels, principalities and powers, thrones and dominions? Who among the innumerable company of angels? Who among those pure, those perfect spirits, who are the most ancient, the most honourable house of the creation, is to be compared to the Father of Spirits. -- *George Swinnock*.

**Verse 6.** *Who can be compared?* The Dutch have translated these words, *Who can be shadowed with him?* that is, they are not worthy to be accounted shadows unto such a comparison with him. -- *Thomas Goodwin*.

**Verse 6.** *Who among the sons of the mighty.* Literally, "*Who is he among the sons of*" *Alim* (or of Gods, as in Ps 29:1,) *i.e.*, according to Suicer, the powerful, the princes of the earth. -- *Daniel Cresswell*.

**Verse 7.** *God is greatly to be feared.* Ainsworth reads, "God is daunting terrible." The original word is Uren, from Ure *arats*, *he was broken, bruised, terrified*. "An epithet of God", says Bythner, "as though breaking all things." -- *Editorial Note to Calvin in loc*.

**Verse 7.** *God is greatly to be feared.* The worship of God is to be performed with great fear and reverence: "*God is greatly to be feared*." Piscator translates it, *Vehementer formidandus*, to be vehemently feared; and opposes it to that formal, careless, trifling, vain spirit, which too often is found in those that approach the Lord in the duties of his worship. -- *John Flavel*.

**Verse 7.** *God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints.* Those saints of his who walk close with him, have a daunting power in their appearance. I appeal to guilty consciences, to apostates, to

professors who have secret haunts of wickedness: sometime when you come but into the presence of one who is a truly gracious godly man or woman whom your conscience tells you walks close with God, doth not even the very sight of such an one terrify you? The very lustre of that holiness you see in such an one strikes upon your conscience. Then you think, such an one walks close with God indeed, but I have basely forsaken the Lord, and have had such a haunt of wickedness, I have brought dreadful guilt upon my soul since I saw him last. Ecclesiastical stories tell us of Basil, when the officers came to apprehend him, he being then exercised in holy duties, that there was such a majesty and lustre came from his countenance, that the officers fell down backward (as they did who came to apprehend Christ), they were not able to lay hold of him. Surely, when the saints shall be raised in their holiness, when every one of them shall have their hearts filled with holiness, it will cause abundance of fear even in all hearts of those that converse with them. --*Jeremiah Burrows*.

**Verse 8.** *Thy faithfulness round about thee.* For just as the tyrants of this world move abroad surrounded by impiety, avarice, contempt of God, and, pride, as with a bodyguard, so God sits on his exalted throne, surrounded with majesty, faithfulness, mercy and equal love to all his people, as with a vesture of gold. --*J. Baptista Folenius*.

**Verse 8.** *Thy faithfulness round about thee.* Whatever he doth, he is mindful of his faithfulness and covenant, before and behind, and on each side; he can look no way, but that is in his eye. And though he employ angels, and send them down into the world, and they stand round about him; yet he hath better harbingers than these--mercy, and truth, and faithfulness, that wait round about him. --*Thomas Goodwin*.

**Verse 9.** *Thou rulest the raging of the sea.* Surely the Spirit of God would have us to take notice, that though the sea be indeed such a giant, such a monster, as will make a heart of oak shake, or a heart of brass melt, yet what is it to God, but an infant? He can bind it and lay it to sleep, even as a little child. And if the great sea be in the hand of God as a little child, what is great to God! and how great is God! What is strong to God! and how strong is God! What or who is too great, or too strong for God to deal with? --*Joseph Caryl.*

**Verse 9.** *Thou rulest.* Here under a figure taken from God's providential government, we have an exhibition of the power of God in defeating the efforts of the enemies of his Church. An instance of this, in the literal sense, we have in the appeasing of the storm by our Lord. "And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." Here we see that God reigns over the sea immediately, and alters or modifies the arrangements of nature according to his sovereign pleasure. That which Jesus did on one occasion is constantly done by the God of providence. He has not left the ocean to be disturbed at random by the winds, nor to be kept in peace by the laws of nature. He rules the raging of the sea. He raises the waves, and he stilleth them. This exhibits a continually working providence. And what he does in providence he does also in his kingdom of grace. He suffers the fury of the enemy to swell against his cause, but he stills it at his pleasure. --*Alexander Carson.*

**Verse 10.** *Broken; scattered.* God has more ways than one to deal with his and his church's enemies. --*Matthew Henry.*

**Verse 10.** *Rahab.* The reason why *Egypt* is expressed in Scripture under this word, ariseth from the two significations of it; first, it signifies *strength*, for Egypt was a very strong nation, and therefore

the Israelites were reprov'd for going to them for help, and relying upon their strength, which though great in itself, yet should be to them but a broken reed; secondly, it signifieth pride, or the proud; men are usually proud of strength, and *Egypt* being a strong nation, was also a very proud nation. --*Joseph Caryl*.

**Verse 11.** *The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine.* Therefore we praise thee, therefore we trust in thee, therefore we will not fear what man can do against us. --*Matthew Henry*.

**Verse 12.** *The north and the south thou hast created them.* etc. The heights of Huttin, commonly fixed on by tradition as the Mount of Beatitudes, appear a little to the west of Tiberias. Over these the graceful top of Mount Tabor is seen, and beyond it the little Hermon, famous for its dews; and still farther, and apparently higher, the bleak mountains of Gilboa, on which David prayed that there might fall no dew nor rain. A view of the position of Tabor and Hermon from such a situation as that which we now occupied, shewed us how accurately they might be reckoned the "*umbilicus terroe*" --the central point of the land, and led us to infer that this is the true explanation of the manner in which they are referred to in the Ps 89:12. It is as if the Psalmist had said North, South, and *all that is between* --or in other words, the whole land from North to South, to its very centre and throughout its very marrow--shall rejoice in thy name. --*R.M. Macheyne*.

**Verse 12.** *Tabor and Hermon.* These hills, the one to the east and the other to the west, in Canaan, were much frequented by the saints of God. David speaks of the sacred hill of *Hermon*, and compares brotherly love to the dew of it. Ps 42:6 133:3. And *Tabor*, yet more eminent for the memorable spot of Christ's transfiguration, and from whence God the Father proclaimed his perfect love and approbation

of Jesus as his dear Son. Well might this hymn, therefore, in allusion to those glorious events, call even the holy hills to rejoice in Jehovah's name, Mt 17:1-5. --*Robert Hawker*.

**Verse 13.** *Strong is thy hand; even thy left hand; as much as to say, tu polles utraque manu, thou hast both hands alike powerful.* --*John Trapp*.

**Verse 14.** *Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne.* As if the Psalmist had said, "The ornaments with which God is invested, instead of being a robe of purple, a diadem, or a sceptre, 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, are under the necessity of borrowing elsewhere what will invest them therewith; but God, having in himself all sufficiency, and standing in no need of any other helps, exhibits to us the splendour of his own image in his righteousness, mercy, and truth. --*John Calvin*.

**Verse 14.** *Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne.* The Holy Ghost alludes to the thrones of earthly princes, which were underpropped with pillars, as Solomon's throne with lions, 1Ki 19:20, that were both a support and an ornament to it. Now, saith the Psalmist, justice and judgment are the pillars upon which God's throne standeth, as Calvin expounds it, the robe and diadem, the purple and sceptre, the regalia with which God's throne is adorned. --*George Swinnock*.

**Verse 14.** *Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne.* Jehovah is here exhibited, by the sacred poet, under the character of a Sovereign, and of a Judge, he being presented to our adoring

regard as on his *throne*; the throne of universal empire, and absolute dominion; as exercising his authority, and executing his laws, with an omnipotent but impartial hand. For "Justice and judgment are the *habitation*", the *preparation*, the *establishment*, or the *basis*, of this throne. Our textual translation is, *habitation*; the marginal, *establishment*; the Septuagint, *preparation*; and, if I mistake not, our best modern interpreters render the original term, *basis* or *foundation*; which, on the whole, seems most agreeable. The *basis*, then, of Jehovah's government, or that on which it rests, is "*justice and judgment*." By "*justice*", I conceive we are to understand the attribute so called; and, by "*judgment*", the impartial exercise of that attribute in the Divine administration. So that were not the Most High to administer impartial justice in his moral government, he might be considered, if it be lawful to use the expression, as abdicating his throne. --*Abraham Booth, 1734-1806.*

**Verse 14.** *Justice*, which defends his subjects, and does every one right. *Judgment*, which restrains rebels, and keeps off injuries. *Mercy*, which shows compassion, pardons, supports the weak. *Truth*, that performs whatsoever he promises. --*William Nicholson.*

**Verse 14.** *Mercy and truth shall go before thy face.* Note--

1. Mercy is said to go before the face of God, because God sends mercy before judgment, that he might find less to punish: so Bellarmine.
2. That God permits not his face to be seen before He has forgiven our sins through mercy: so Rickelius.
3. That no one comes to the knowledge of God, but he who has obtained mercy beforehand.



4. That God comes to no one unless His grace go before Him. ...Truth goes before the face of God, because God keeps it ever before his eyes, to mould his actions thereby. Pindar calls truth yugatera Dios the daughter of God. Epaminoudas the Theban general, cultivated truth so studiously, that he is reported never to have spoken a falsehood even in jest. In the courts of kings this is a rare virtue. --*Le Blanc*.

**Verse 14.** *Mercy and truth.* *Mercy* in promising; *truth* in performing. *Truth*, in being as good as thy word; *mercy*, in being better. --*Matthew Henry*.

**Verse 14.** *Shall go.* In his *active going forth*, tender mercy and goodness announce him, and faithful truth will tell his people he is there when he comes forth. His activities are mercy and faithfulness, because his will is at work and his nature is love. Yet his throne still maintains justice and judgment. --*J.N. Darby*.

**Verse 15.** *Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound.* Not that *hear*, for then the blessing were cheap indeed. Thousands hear the Gospel sound, but sometimes not ten of a thousand know it. --*Thomas James Judkin, 1841*.

**Verse 15.** *Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound* --viz., of the trumpets sounded in token of joy at the great festivals, and chiefly on the first day of the seventh month, the feast of trumpets (Le 23:24), and on extraordinary occasions, especially after the yearly atonement, on the day of jubilee, the tenth day of the seventh month of the fiftieth year, proclaiming liberty to bondmen, and restoration of their inheritance to them that had forfeited it (Le 25:8-10). As the jubilee joy did not come till after the atonement, so no

Gospel joy and liberty are ours till first we know Christ as our atonement. "In the day of the people's gladness" they blew the trumpets over their sacrifices, "that they might be to them for a memorial before God" (Nu 10:10). David and Israel brought up the ark of the Lord to Zion "with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet" (2Sa 6:15). In Nu 23:21, Balaam makes it the distinguishing glory of Israel, "The Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them", (Compare Ps 98:6 27:6 margin) --A.R. Fausset.

**Verse 15.** *People that know the joyful sound.* Here it is supposed that we have intelligence in respect of "*the joyful sound.*" For there is knowledge not merely of the utterances and intonations, but of the sense and substance, of the thought and feeling, which they convey. And I suppose this to be the meaning of Christ when he says, "My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me; and a stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers." And I have often been surprised, to note the accuracy with which persons otherwise not very intelligent, not largely informed, not of critical acumen, will yet, when they hear a discourse, judge, discriminate, determine; will be able to say at once--"Truth, clear, unmixed, without a cloud upon it; "or--"Doctrine clouded, statements confused, not the lucid Gospel:" or be able to say, if it be so--"No Gospel at all; contradiction to the truth of Christ." They "*Know the joyful sound*", as it rolls from the plenitude of God's own voice and bosom in his august and blessed revelations; as it is confirmed, authenticated and sealed by the precious blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; as it is witnessed to by the eternal Spirit: "*the joyful sound*", that there is salvation for lost and ruined men by faith in the blood and in the obedience of him who died upon the tree, and is now enthroned in the highest place in heaven. --James Stratten, 1845.

**Verse 15.** *They shall walk in the light of thy countenance.* Surely,

next to the love of God's heart, believers value the smiles of his face; from which, as from the agency of the sun, arise the budding of conscious joy, the leaves of unsullied profession, the variegated blossom of holy tempers, and the beneficent fruits of moral righteousness. They are totally mistaken who suppose that *the light of God's countenance*, and the privileges of the gospel, and the comforts of the Spirit, conduce to make us indolent and inactive in the way of duty. The text cuts up this surmise by the roots. For, it does not say, they shall *sit down* in the light of thy countenance; or, they shall *lie down* in the light of thy countenance; but "*they shall WALK* in the light of thy countenance." What is walking? It is a progressive motion from one point of space to another. And what is that holy walking which God's Spirit enables all his people to observe? It is a continued, progressive motion from sin to holiness; from all that is evil, to every good word and work. And the self same "light of God's countenance" in which you, O believer, are enabled to walk, and which at first gave you spiritual feet wherewith to walk, will keep you in a walking and in a working state, to the end of your warfare. --*Augustus Montague Toplady*.

**Verse 15.** --There is the dreadful and there is the joyful sound. The dreadful sound was at Mount Sinai. The joyful sound is from Mount Sion. When the people heard the former they were far from beholding the glory of God's face. Moses only was admitted to see His "back parts"; the people were kept at a distance, and the light of God's glory that they saw was so terrible to them, that they could not abide it. But they that know the "joyful sound." they shall be admitted near, nearer than Moses, so as to see the glory of God's face or brightness of his countenance, and that not only transiently, as Moses saw God's back parts, but continually. The light of God's glory shall not be terrible to them, but easy and sweet, so that they may dwell in it and walk in it; and it shall be to them instead of the light

of the sun; for the sun shall no more be their light by day, nor the moon by night, but God shall be their everlasting light, Compare this with Isa 2:5 Re 21:23-24 Re 22:4-5 --*Jonathan Edwards*

**Verse 16.** *And in thy righteousness shall they be exalted.* In these words briefly we may notice,

1. The believer's promotion; he is *exalted*. In the first Adam we were debased unto the lowest hell, the crown having fallen from our heads; but in Christ, the second Adam, we are again exalted; yea, exalted as high as heaven, for we "sit together with him in heavenly places", says the apostle. This is an incredible paradox to a blind world, that the believer who is sitting at this moment upon the dunghill of this earth, should at the same time be sitting in heaven in Christ, his glorious Head and representative, Eph 2:6.

2. We have the ground of the believer's preferment and exaltation; it is *in thy righteousness*. It is not in any righteousness of his own; no, this he utterly disclaims, reckoning it but "dung and loss", "filthy rags", dogs' meat: but it is in *thy* righteousness; that is, the righteousness of God, as the apostle calls it: Ro 1:17 Php 3:9. The righteousness of God is variously taken in Scripture. Sometimes for the infinite rectitude and equity of his nature: Ps 11:7, "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness." Sometimes for his rectorial equity, or distributive justice which he exerciseth in the government of the world, rewarding the good and punishing evil doers: Ps 97:2, "Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." Sometimes it is put for his veracity and faithfulness in accomplishing his word of promise, or in executing his word of threatening: Ps 36:5-6, "Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds: thy righteousness is like the great mountains." Sometimes it is put for the perfect righteousness which Christ the Son of God, as our Surety and

Mediator, brought in, by his obedience to the law, and death on the cross, for the justification of guilty sinners: and this as I said, is frequently called the righteousness of God; and in this sense I understand it here in the text: "*In thy righteousness shall they be exalted.*" --*Ebenezer Erskine.*

**Verse 17.** *In thy favour our horn shall be exalted.* A man of lofty bearing is said to carry his horn very high. To him who is proudly interfering with the affairs of another it will be said, "Why show your *kombu*", "horn", "here?" "See that fellow, what a fine horn he has; he will make the people run." "Truly, my lord, you have a great horn." "Chinnan has lost his money; aye, and his hornship too." "Alas, alas! I am like the deer, whose horns have fallen off." --*Joseph Roberts* "*Oriental Illustrations.*"

**Verse 19** (*second clause*). --(New Translation) *A mighty chief have I supplied with help.* Literally, "I have equalized help", that is, I have laid or given sufficient help, "upon a mighty one". The verb denotes "to equalize", or "make one thing equal or equiponderant to another", as a means to the end, or vice versa. --*Richard Mant.*

**Verse 19.** *Chosen* has here its strict sense, but not without allusion to its specific use as signifying a young warrior. --*J. A. Alexander.*

**Verse 20.** *With my holy oil have I appointed him.* As the literal David was thrice anointed king, once by Samuel in Jesse's house at Bethlehem: once at Hebron after the death of Saul, as king over Judah; and again at seven years' end, as ruler over all Israel: so also "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power" in his nativity at Bethlehem; a second time over his Church at his resurrection, when the tyrant who sought his life was overcome, and then only over the small "confederation" (which *Hebron* means)

of his Jewish disciples; but a third time in his ascension to the heavenly Jerusalem, the Vision of Peace, where he, now crowned as King of Glory, was anointed over all heaven and earth, supreme over all the princes of God. He was thrice anointed in another sense also, once as Prophet, once as Priest, and once as King. --*Neale and Littledale.*

**Verse 20-24.** I have FOUND David, God exclaims. When sin brought death into the world, and annihilated the hopes of mankind from the first covenant, *I* --the Almighty--in my care for them, *sought out* a Redeemer. I sought for him in the Divine Nature; and I "*found*" him in My Only Son. I endowed him with ample powers, and I covenanted that, in the weakness of his Incarnation, *my hand and arm* should *strengthen* him. I declared that Satan *the enemy* should *not exact upon him*; nor should Judas--*the son of wickedness* --be enabled to *afflict him*. The Jews, *his foes*, shall fall before him; they shall be *smitten down* in their rejection of him; they shall perish from off their land, and be dispersed abroad among the nations. My *truth* shall be ever with him; and acting in my *name* and power, he shall be exalted and glorified amongst men. --*William Hill Tucker.*

**Verse 22.** *The enemy shall not exact upon him.* 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, quoted by Ed. of Calvin.*

**Verse 25.** *I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers.* That is, he should reign from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates; figuratively expressed by his left hand being extended to the sea, and his right hand to the rivers. A similar expression is used, according to Curtius, by the Scythian ambassadors to Alexander. "If",

said they, "the gods had given thee a body as great as thy mind, the whole world would not be able to contain thee. Thou wouldst reach with one hand to the east, and with the other to the west." --*Kitto's Pictorial Bible*.

**Verse 25.** *I will set his hand also in the sea and his right hand in the rivers.* A certain artist was in the habit of saying that he should represent Alexander in such a manner, that in one hand he should hold a city and from the other pour a river. Christ is represented here as of immense stature, higher than all mountains, with one hand holding the earth, and the other the sea, while from Eastern sea to Western he extends his arms. --*Le Blanc*.

**Verse 26.** *He shall cry unto me, thou art my father.* When did David call God his Father? It is striking that we do not find anywhere in the Old Testament that the patriarchs or prophets called God their Father. You do not find them addressing Him as Father: they did not know him as such. This verse is unintelligible in reference to David; but in regard to the True David it is exactly what he did say, --"My Father, and your Father; my God, and your God." Never until Christ uttered these words, never until he appeared on earth in humanity as the Son of God, did any man or any child of humanity address God in this endearing character. It was after Christ said, "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father", that believers were enabled to look up to God and to say, "Abba, Father". Here you see distinctly that this applies to Christ. He was the first to say this: David did not say it. If there were no other proof in the whole Psalm, that one clause would be a demonstration to me that no other man than the Lord Jesus Christ can be here spoken of. --*Capel Molyneux, 1855*.

**Verse 26.** *My Father.* Christ commenced his labours by referring to his Father, for in Lu 2:49 he says, "Wist ye not that I must be about

my Father's business?" and his last words were, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit"; and through his whole life he most constantly addressed God as his Father. *He shall cry unto me: Thou art my Father*, as far as my divinity is concerned. *My God*, as far as my humanity is concerned; *the support of my salvation*, as regards my mortality. --*Bellarmino*.

**Verse 26-28.** Christ had a command to be a sufferer, and a body prepared him for that purpose; so he had likewise a command to be an advocate, and a life given him, and a throne prepared for him at the right hand of God to that end. This commission is contained in the words before us; and this after his exaltation, Ps 89:24-25. Yet for the full completing of it, Ps 89:27 the matter of the plea is here mentioned, *Thou art the rock of my salvation*, the foundation, the first cause, of all thy salvation I have wrought in the world, being the first mover of it, and promising the acceptance of me in the performance of what was necessary for it. As he hath authority to cry to God, so he hath an assurance of the prevalence of his cry, in regard of the stability of the covenant of mediation, which shall stand fast with him, or be faithful to him: *my mercy will I keep for him for evermore*, Ps 89:28. The treasures of my mercy are reserved only to be opened and dispensed by him: and the enjoying of his spiritual seed for ever, and the establishing of his own throne thereby, is the promised fruit of this cry, Ps 89:28. --*Stephen Charnock*.

**Verse 27.** *I will make him my firstborn*. First, because he is first in the order of predestination; for it is through him, as through the head, that we are predestinated, as we read in Eph 1:1-23. Secondly, because he is first in the second generation to life everlasting, whence he is called (Col 1:18.) *the firstborn from the dead*, and in Re 1:5, *the first begotten of the dead*; and, thirdly, because he had the rights of the firstborn; for *he was appointed heir of all things*; and he



was made not only firstborn, but also, *high above the kings of the earth*; that is, Prince of the kings of the earth, and King of kings. -- *Bellarmino*.

**Verse 27.** *Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the, earth.* This promise plainly implies superiority of a nature similar to what was enjoyed of old by the eldest son of a family--the birthright privileges and blessings, which consisted principally in three important particulars: First, A double portion of the parent's earthly possessions, De 21:17. Secondly. Rule or authority over the younger branches of the family, 2Ch 21:3; and Thirdly, The exercise of the priesthood, because God claimed all the firstborn as his, and in their stead he appointed the Levites to do the priest's office, Nu 8:14-17. But, whilst it is literally true that Jesus was the firstborn son of his virgin mother, and on that account entitled to the customary privileges, the promise in the 89th Psalm (Ps 89:1-52) gives intimation of something specific and unusual. David was the youngest son of Jesse, the lowest on the list of a numerous family, -- the very last individual among them who could have expected exaltation over all others. But, notwithstanding these natural disadvantages, he was God's choice; and by referring to the Scripture history it would be easy to show in a variety of particulars, how the promise made to David, *I will make him my firstborn*, was literally and remarkably fulfilled in the son of Jesse. In like manner Jesse, to all human appearance, entering the world as heir apparent only to the poverty of Mary and her espoused husband, was far removed from every prospect of realizing that combination of royal and sacerdotal prerogative, which nevertheless was made stare to him by the promise of his heavenly Father: "I will make him *my* firstborn." The pronoun "*my*" gives great emphasis to the promise, but this word is interpolated; and however truly it conveys an idea of the unspeakable superiority which belongs to Jesus Christ as the result

of his relationship with God, still we shall find that, even without this important pronoun, the promise simply of being "firstborn" has a sublimity and grandeur about it which needs neither ornament nor addition. The great Jehovah, the Maker and the Owner and the Ruler of the universe, hath said respecting his Christ, "I will make him my firstborn"; that is, I will constitute him the chief of all creatures, and the depository of all power, and the possessor of all privileges, and the heir of all creation. By way of excellence, he is the firstborn, "higher than all the kings of the earth", -- enjoying priority in point of time, and precedence in point of place. --*David Pitcairn, in "The Anointed Saviour", 1846.*

**Verse 27.** *My firstborn.* In the Hebrew idiom all kings were *the sons of God*: but David is the chief of these, God's *firstborn*. The Greeks had a similar mode of expressing themselves. Kings were the nurslings of Jupiter. --*Alexander Geddes.*

**Verse 28.** *My mercy will I keep for him for evermore.* How will he keep his mercy for Christ for evermore? Very simply, I think. Is not Christ the Fountain of all mercy to us? Is it not the mercy of God the Father flowing to us through Christ that we enjoy? Is he not the Depository of it all? God says, then, I will keep it for him; for ever and ever shall it be lodged in Christ, and Isis people shall enjoy it throughout eternity. --*Capel Molyneux, 1855.*

**Verse 28-30.** Here is comfort to those who are true branches, and continue to bring forth fruit in the midst of all the trials that befall them, that God will not suffer them to be cut off by their corruption. If anything in them should provoke God to do it, it must be sin. Now for that, you see how Christ promises that God will take order therewith, and will purge it out of them. This is the covenant made with David, (as he was a type of Christ, with whom the same

covenant is made sure and firm,)that *if his seed forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments*, --What! presently turn them out of doors, and cut them off, as those he meant to have no more to do with? What! nothing but utter rejection? Is there no means of reclaiming them? Never a rod in the house? Yes--*then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes, whip out their stubbornness and sinfulness; but my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him* as I did from Saul, as it is in 1Ch 17:13. Let the saints consider this, that they may return when they are fallen, and submit to him and his nature, and suffer him to do what he will with them, and endure cutting, and lancing, and burning, so long as he cuts them not off; endure chastening, and all his dealings else, knowing that all the fruit is but to take away the sin, to make them "partakers of his holiness"; and "if by any means", as Paul speaks of himself, (Php 3:11), be the means what it will, it is no matter. And God, if at any time he seems to cut thee off, yet it is but as the incestuous Corinthian was cut off, `that the flesh might be destroyed, and the spirit saved.' --*Thomas Goodwin*.

**Verse 29.** "His seed" and "throne" are coupled together, as if his throne could not stand if his seed did fail. If his subjects should perish, what would he be king of? If his members should consume, what would he be head of? --*Stephen Charnock*.

**Verse 30.** *If his children forsake my law*. An objection is supposed: `Suppose this seed who are included in the covenant fall into transgression, how shall the covenant stand fast then?' The covenant, with the seed, shall stand for ever, but the seed must be a holy seed. Then the objector supposes--`Suppose the seed become unholy?' Well, God explains--"If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments" --that is, if the seed practically fall away--"If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit

their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail." Mark the case. What is it that God will do? The case supposed is that the seed of Christ forsakes the law and breaks his statutes. I need not say to you that that is realized every day. These are not the ungodly or the unconverted that are spoken of, but God's own children. Do you say, `Can they be guilty of breaking God's statutes, and forsaking God's law?' We do it every day. There is no single day of our lives that we do not do it. . . .

How astonished many would be, if they knew what the real case was of those perhaps whom they admire, and think highly advanced and exalted in the Divine life, if they were to know the falls, the wretched falls, falls in heart, in word and in practice; if they were to know the deep distress that the children of God, who are far advanced as they suppose in the Divine life, are continually suffering from the effect of such transgression! That is exactly what God says; he comes and contemplates such a case, and he says, "If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments, then" --what? What will God do? Some people say, "Then God will leave them." Those who object to the doctrine of final perseverance say this: "It is true he will preserve the believer from the toils of the Devil and the temptations of the world, but not from the breaking forth of his own natural evil." He may be betrayed by that, and finally lost. God exactly meets that case; he contemplates the worst case--actual transgression. He says, "If a child of mine breaks my law". He does not say anything about the Devil, or the outward temptations of the world; but he says, "If they forsake my law and break my statutes." Let us be instructed by God. He does not say he will leave them and forsake them. Mark what he will do! He say--"I will visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes." That is the provision which God has made in his covenant: and it is delightful to see how God has

contemplated our case to the uttermost. There is nothing in our history that God has not met in the covenant with Christ. If you are in union with Christ, and a partaker of the covenant, your case is met in every conceivable emergency. Nothing can befall you which is not contemplated--nothing which God has not provided for. Even if you fall, God has provided for it; but take heed; the provision involves much that will be terrible and desperately painful to your mind. There is nothing to encourage sin about it; there is nothing to give us license, nothing to lead a man to boast, "I am safe at last." Be it so: but safe how? How will God secure their safety? "I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes." --*Capel Molyneux*.

**Verse 30.** *If his children forsake my law.* If they fall into sins of commission; if they shoot beyond the mark. *And walk not in my judgements.* If they fall into sins of omission, and shoot short. Where note that *every transgression and disobedience* (that is, every commission and omission) *receiveth a just recompense of reward*, Heb 2:2. --*John Trapp*.

**Verse 30.** *His children.* *wynb*, his sons, i.e. Christians, born through the griefs of Christ on the cross, like the pangs of one in travail. --*Geier*.

**Verse 30.** A man may forsake the doctrines of the Gospel. He may fall into great errors, great aberrations from Truth; he may forsake the ordinances of the Lord's house, though he sees God's word is clear upon the point. He esteems those things as nothing worth, which the Lord esteems so well, that he has given them to his church as a sacred deposit, which she is to convey down to the last posterity till time shall be no more. And what is still more--a man may forsake for a time the principles of the precious Gospel of the living God. But

I can imagine a state still more solemnly affecting than even this. It is a part of God's wisdom, (and it is for our good that it is so-- all God's wisdom is for his people's good) --it is a part of the wisdom of God, that sin should lead to sin; that one neglect shall pave the way to another; that that which is bad shall lead to that which is worse, and that which is worse shall prepare the way for that which is worst...The longer I live, the more I am brought to this-- to know that there is not a sin that ever was committed, but I need the grace of God to keep me from it. --*James Harrington Evans*.

**Verses 30-34.** God here says two things: first, that he will chastise them, next, that he will not, on that account, cast them out of his covenant. O wonderful tempering of the kindness and severity of God! In which he finds his own glory, and believers their safety! The heavenly Father loves the blood and marks of his Christ which he sees upon them, and the remains of faith and godliness which are preserved hidden in the depth of their heart, this is why he will not cast them off. On the other hand, he considers that it accords neither with his wisdom nor his holiness to bestow his grace and salvation upon those who do not relent for having cast off his law and given themselves up to iniquity. In order to harmonize these opposite desires, he takes the rod, and chastises them, to arouse their conscience, and to excite their faith; to restore them, by the repentance which his discipline produces, to such a state, as that he may be able to bestow upon them, without shame, the blessings he has promised to the children of his Son; just as a wise parent, by moderate and judicious correction gradually draws back his son from those irregularities of life into which he has plunged; and thereby preserves his honour, and himself the pleasure of being able to love and please him without misgiving. Or, as a skilful surgeon, by the pain which his knife, or cautery, or bitter potions, cause his patient, saves his life, and wards off death. --*Jean Daille*.

**Verses 30-34.** When our heavenly Father is, as it were, forced to put forth his anger, he then makes use of a father's rod, not an executioner's axe. He will neither break his children's bones, nor his own covenant. He lashes in love, in measure, in pity, and compassion. --*Thomas Lye*, 1621-1684.

**Verse 32.** *Then will I visit their transgression with the rod*, etc. He does not simply say, I will smite them; but, I will visit with the rod. It is one thing merely to smite, it is another thing to smite by visiting. For visitation implies oversight and paternal care. The metaphor is taken from those who undertake to watch over the sick, or train up children, or tend sheep. He does not say, I will visit them with the rod; but, I will visit their transgression with the rod. We ought to think perpetually, what it is the rod of God visits in us, that we may confess our transgressions, and amend our lives. --*Musculus*.

**Verse 33.** *Nevertheless my lovingkindness*, etc. Except the covenant of grace had this article in it for remission of sin and for fatherly correction, to drive unto repentance, that the penitent person coming to God by faith might have sin forgiven him and lovingkindness shown to him; this covenant should fail us no less than the covenant of works. --*David Dickson*.

**Verse 33.** *I will not utterly take from him*. Why "from *him*?" Because all God's lovingkindness to his people is centred in Christ. Does God love you? it is because he loves Christ; you are one with Christ. Your transgressions are your own; they are separate from Christ; but God's love is not your own; it is Christ's: you receive it because you are one with him. How beautifully that is distinguished here--"If they transgress, I will punish *them*; but my lovingkindness will I not take from *him*" --in whom alone they find it; and in union

with whom alone they enjoy it. --*Capel Molyneux*.

**Verse 33.** *From him.* The words, "*Nevertheless my lovingkindness will not utterly take from him*", are worthy of consideration; for the question being about those who are chastised, it would appear that he should have written, from them, and not from him. But the prophet has thus worded it, because, being the children and members of his Christ, the favours which God bestows upon us belong to him in some manner; and it seems that the Psalmist wishes to show us hereby, that it is in Jesus Christ, and for love of him alone, that God bestows favours on us. And that which follows, in Ps 89:34 verse, agrees herewith, --*My covenant will I not break* --for it is properly to Jesus Christ, on account of his admirable obedience, that God the Father has promised to be merciful to our iniquities, and never to leave one of those to perish who are in covenant with him. --*Jean Daille*.

**Verse 33.** *Nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.* Man's faith may fail him sometimes, but God's faithfulness never fails him: God will not suffer his faithfulness to fail. God's operations may have an aspect that way; the devil's temptations, and our unbelieving hearts, may not only make us think so, but persuade us it is so, whereas it cannot be so, for the Lord will not suffer it, he will not make a lie in his truth or faithfulness; so the Hebrew is: he is a God that cannot lie, he is Truth, speaks truth, and not one of his promises can or shall fail; which may afford strong consolation unto all that are under any promise of God. --*William Greenhill*.

**Verse 34.** *My covenant will I not break.* 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 gratuitous pardon. --*John Calvin.*

**Verse 35.** *Once have I sworn by my holiness.* He lays here his holiness to pledge for the assurance of his promise, as the attribute most dear to him, most valued by him, as though no other could give an assurance parallel to it, in this concern of an everlasting redemption, which is there spoken of. He that swears, swears by a greater than himself. God having no greater than himself, swears by himself; and swearing here by his holiness seems to equal that single to all his other attributes, as if he were more concerned in the honour of it than of all the rest. It is as if he should have said, Since I have not a more excellent perfection to swear by than that of my holiness, I lay this to pawn for your security, and bind myself by that which I will never part with, were it possible for me to be stripped of all the rest. It is a tacit imprecation of himself, If I lie unto David, let me never be counted holy, or thought righteous enough to be trusted by angels or men. This attribute he makes most of. --*Stephen Charnock.*

**Verse 36.** *His seed shall endure for ever.* They shall continue for ever in three senses. *First.* In the succession of their race to the end of the world. It will never be cut off. --"The Church is in danger!" *What Church?* "Upon this rock", says he, "I will build *my* Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Yea, his people shall continue to increase in number and excellency. We shall leave the world better than we entered it: and so will our *children*; till Jerusalem shall be established, and be made a praise in the whole earth. *Secondly.* In their religious character to the end of their own life. If left to themselves, we could not be sure of their persevering to

the end of a day or an hour. But they are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation. He upholdeth them with his hand. They shall hold on their way. In all their dangers they shall be more than conquerors. *Thirdly*. In their glorified state, through eternal ages. The world passeth away, and the lusts thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. All other greatness is only for life: it is frequently less durable--at death it *ends*. But *then*, the Christian's greatness--I will not say, begins; for it began the moment he prayed--but then it continues, increases, and is perfected. --*William Jay*.

**Verse 37.** *It shall be established for ever as the moon.* This clause Kimchi expounds not only of the perpetuity, but of the quality and condition of David's Kingdom, after this fashion: If his children be good, they shall be like the moon, when full and shining; if bad, like the moon waning and obscure. Nevertheless the kingdom itself shall not cease, just as the moon does not go out of existence, whilst it is obscure, but lasts perpetually. --*Musculus*.

**Verse 37.** *And as a faithful witness in heaven.* (New Translation) *And as the rainbow's faithful sign.* The rainbow is not expressly mentioned in the original, which speaks only of "the faithful witness in heaven." Some commentators understand the "witness" thus mentioned to be no other than the moon itself. I prefer, however, the interpretation that fixes it on the rainbow, which God after the deluge appointed as a "sign" or "witness" of his mercy in Christ. Ge 9:12-17. Conformably to this appointment, the Jews, when they behold the rainbow, are said to bless God, who remembers his covenant and is faithful to his promise. And the tradition of this its designation to proclaim comfort to mankind was strong among the heathens: for, according to the mythology of the Greeks, the "rainbow" was the daughter of "wonder", "a sign to mortal men", and

regarded, upon its appearance, as a messenger of the celestial deities. Thus Homer with remarkable conformity to the Scripture account speaks of the "rainbow", which "Jove hath set in the cloud, a sign to men." --*Richard Mant*.

**Verse 38.** *But thou hast cast off*, etc. The complaining of the saints meanwhile is so exaggerated, that carnal feeling makes itself more apparent in them, than faith...Yet such is the goodness of God, He is not offended with these complaints, provided faith is not altogether extinguished, or succumbs. --*Mollerus*.

**Verse 39.** *Thou hast profaned his crown*, etc. The crown of a king, (like that of the high priest, on which was inscribed "holiness to the Lord") (Ex 28:36) was a sacred thing, and therefore to cast it in the dust was to profane it. --*A.R. Fausset*.

**Verse 40.** *Hedges and strong holds*. Both of these may refer to the appointments of a vineyard in which the king was the vine. It was usually fenced around with a stone wall, and in it was a small house or tower, wherein a keeper was set to keep away intruders. When the wall, or hedge, was thrown down, every passer by plucked at the fruit, and when the tower was gone the vineyard was left open to the neighbours who could do as they would with the vines. When the church is no longer separated from the world, and her divine Keeper has no more a dwelling place within her, her plight is wretched indeed. --*C.H.S.*

**Verse 43.** *Thou hast also turned the edge of his sword*, etc. The arms and military prowess of thy people are no longer of any use to them; Thou art *against* them, and therefore they are fallen. In what a perilous and hopeless situation must that soldier be who, defending his life against his mortal foe, has his sword *broken*, or its *edge*

*turned*; or, in modern warfare, whose *gun* misses *fire*! The *Gauls*, when invaded by the Romans, had no method of *hardening iron*; at every blow their swords *bent*, so that they were obliged, before they could strike again, to put them under their foot or over their knee, to straighten them; and in most cases, before this could be done, their better armed foe had taken away their life! The edge of their sword was turned, so that they could not stand in battle; and hence the *Gauls* were conquered by the Romans. --*Adam Clarke*.

**Verse 43.** *Thou hast also turned the edge of his sword*, that it cannot do execution as it has done; and what is worse, thou hast "turned the edge" of his spirit, and taken off his courage, and hast not made him *to stand*, as he used to do, *in the day of battle*. The spirit of men is what the Father and Former of spirits makes them; nor can we stand with any strength or resolution, farther than God is pleased to uphold us. If men's hearts fail them, it is God that dispirits them; but it is sad with the church when those cannot stand that should stand up for it. --*Matthew Henry*.

**Verse 45.** *The days of his youth hast thou shortened*. Our kings have not reigned half their days, nor lived out half their lives. The *four* last kings of Judea reigned but a short time, and either died by the sword or in captivity. *Jehoahaz* reigned only *three months*, and was led captive to Egypt, where he *died*. *Jehoiakim* reigned only *eleven years*, and was tributary to the Chaldeans, who *put him to death*, and cast his body into the common sewer. *Jehoiachim*, reigned *three months and ten days*, and was led *captive* to Babylon, where he continued in prison to the time of Evil merodach, who, though he loosed him from prison, never invested him with any power. *Zedekiah*, the last of all, had reigned only *eleven years* when he was taken, *his eyes put out*, was *loaded with chains*, and thus carried to Babylon. Most of these kings died a violent and *premature*

death. Thus the "*days of their youth*" -- of their power, dignity, and life, "*were shortened*", and they themselves *covered with shame. Selah*; so it most incontestably is. --*Adam Clarke.*

**Verse 45.** *Thou hast covered them with shame. Selah.* Thou hast wrapped him up in the winding sheet of shame. Lord, this is true. --*John Trapp.*

**Verses 46-47.** This undoubtedly sounds like the voice of one who knows no hereafter. The Psalmist speaks as if all his hopes were bound by the grave; as if the overthrow of the united kingdom of Judah and Ephraim had bereft him of all his joy; and as if he knew no future kingdom to compensate him with its hopes. But it would be doing cruel injustice to take him thus at his word. What we hear is the language of passion, not of sedate conviction. This is well expressed by John Howe in a famous sermon. "The expostulation (he observes) was somewhat passionate, and did proceed upon the sudden view of this disconsolate case, very abstractly considered, and by itself only; and the Psalmist did not, at that instant, look beyond it to a better and more comfortable scene of things. An eye bleared with present sorrow sees not far, nor comprehends so much at one view, as it would at another time, or as it doth presently when the tear is wiped out and its own beams have cleared it up." It would be unwarrantable, therefore, to infer from Ethan's expostulation, that the saints who lived under the early kings were strangers to the hope of everlasting life. I am inclined to go further, and to point to this very complaint as affording a presumption that there was in their hearts an irrepressible sentiment of immortality. The bird that frets and wounds itself on the bars of its cage shows thereby that its proper home is the free air. When inveterate sensuality has succeeded in quenching in a man's heart the hope of a life beyond the grave, the dreary void which succeeds utters itself, not in solemn

complaints like Ethan's, but in songs of forced mirth--dismal Anacreontic songs: "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die."

"It is time to live if I grow old,  
It is time short pleasures now to take,  
Of little life the best to make,  
And manage wisely the last stake."

(Anacreon's *Age*, as translated by Cowley.) --*William Binnie*.

**Verse 46.** *Shall thy wrath burn like fire?* An element that hath no mercy. --*William Nicholson*.

**Verse 47.** *Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?* If I should demand of any, for what cause especially man came into the world; he would answer with the Psalmist, God did not create man in vain. Did He create man to heap up wealth together? no, for the apostle saith. "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out. And, having food and raiment, let us be therewith content." 1Ti 6:6-8. Did he create him to hawk after power and principality? no, for Nebuchadnezzar lusting after these, lost no less than a kingdom. Did He create him to eat, drink and play? no, for Seneca, though an heathen saith, *major sum*, etc., I am greater, and born to greater things, than that I should be a vile slave of my senses. What then is the proper end of man? That we should live to the praise of the glory of his grace wherewith he hath made us freely accepted in his Beloved. Eph 1:6. --*William Pulley*.

**Verse 47.** *Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?* If we think that God hath made man "*in vain*", because so many have short lives, and long afflictions in this world, it is true that God "hath made" them so; but it is not true, that therefore they are "made in vain". For those whose days are few and full of trouble, yet may glorify God,

and do some good, may keep their communion with God, and go to heaven, and then they are not made in vain. If we think that God has made men in vain, because the most of men neither serve him nor enjoy him, it is true, that as to themselves, they were made in vain, better for them they had not been born, than not be "born again"; but it was not owing to God, that they were made in vain, it was owing to themselves; nor are they made in vain as to him; for he has "made all things for himself, even the wicked for the day of evil", and those whom he is not glorified by he will be glorified upon. --*Matthew Henry*.

**Verse 47.** *Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?* When I add to the consideration of my short time, that of dying mankind, and behold a dark and deadly shade universally overspreading the world, the whole species of human creatures vanishing, quitting the stage round about me, and disappearing almost as soon as they show themselves; have I not a fair and plausible ground for that (seemingly rude) challenge? Why is there so unaccountable a phenomenon? Such a creature made to no purpose; the noblest part of this inferior creation brought forth into being without any imaginable design? I know not how to untie the knot, upon this only view of the case, or avoid the absurdity. It is hard sure to design the supposal, (or what it may yet seem hard to suppose), "*that all men were made in vain.*" --*John Howe*.

**Verse 47.** *Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?* Two thoughts crush us--*Man was made to mourn, and man was made in vain.* Yes, this thought is painfully pressed upon us, --man is "*made in vain!*" In how many particulars, especially when we survey that large range of characters to which we may give the denomination of wasted lives; there to behold peerless *genius* frittering itself away upon unworthy attainments, upon worthless performances;

*imagination* that might adorn truth, if that *were* possible; *wit*, that might select and discriminate the true from the false; and *eloquence* that might enforce the true; --where do we find these? Unsatisfactory and miserable world, may we well exclaim, where nothing is real, and nothing is realised: when I consider how our lives are passed in the struggle for existence; when I consider the worry of life, where it is not a woe--the woe, where it is not a worry; when I consider how the millions pass their time in a mere toil for sensual objects, and that those to whom the sad contradiction of life never comes, are the most wretched of all, did they but know it; when I consider the millions of distorted existences; and the many millions! --the greater number of the world by far--who wander Christless, loveless, hopeless, over the broad highway of it; when I consider life in many of the awakened as a restless dream, as children beating the curtain and crying in the night; when I consider how many questions recur for ever to us; and will not be silenced, and cannot be answered; when I consider the vanity of the philosopher's inquisitiveness, and the end of Royalty in the tomb; when I look round on the region of my own joys, and know how short their lease is, and that their very ineffableness is a blight upon them; when I consider how little the best can do, and that none can do anything well; and, finally, when I consider the immeasurable immensity of thought within, unfulfilled, and the goading restlessness, I can almost exclaim with our unhappy poet *Byron* --

"Count all the joys thine hours have seen,  
Count all thy days from anguish free,  
And know, whatever thou last been,  
It were something better not to be."  
--*E. Paxton Hood*, in "Dark Sayings on a Harp", 1865.

**Verses 47-48.** In these verses, the fundamental condition of Israel's blessedness is found to be an acknowledgment of the total



unprofitableness of the flesh. Resurrection is the basis upon which the sure mercies of David rest available for faith (Ac 13:34). This is rather implied than directly stated in the present Psalm. --*Arthur Pridham*.

**Verse 48.** *What man. Mi gheber*, says the original; it is not *Is he*, which is the first name of man, in the Scriptures, and signifies nothing but a *sound*, a voice, a word, a musical air which dies, and evaporates; what wonder if man, that is but *Ishe*, a *sound*, should die too? It is not Adam, which is another name of man, and signifies nothing but *red earth*; let it be earth red with blood, (with that murder which we have done upon ourselves,) let it be earth red with blushing, (so the word is used in the original), with a conscience of our own infirmity, what wonder if man, that is but Adam, guilty of this self murder in himself, guilty of this inborn frailty in himself, die too? It is not *Enos*, which is also a third name of man, and signifies nothing but a *wretched and miserable creature*; what wonder that man, that is but earth, that is a burden to his neighbours, to his friends, to his kindred, to himself, to whom all others, and to whom myself desires death, what wonder if he die? But this question is framed upon more of these names; not *Ishe*, not Adam, not Enos; but it is *Mi gheber, Quis vir*; which is the word always signifying a man accomplished in all excellencies, a man accompanied with all advantages; fame, and a good opinion justly conceived, keeps him from being *Ishe*, a mere sound, standing only upon popular acclamation; innocency and integrity keeps him from being Adam, red earth, from bleeding, or blushing at anything he hath done; that holy and religious art of arts, which St. Paul professed. *That he knew how to want, and how to abound*, keeps him from being Enos, miserable or wretched in any fortune; he is *gheber*, a great man, and a good man, a happy man, and a holy man, and yet *Mi gheber, Quis homo*, this man must see death. --*John Donne*.

**Verse 48.** This Psalm is one of those twelve that are marked in the forehead with *Maschil*; that is, *a Psalm giving instruction*. It consisteth of as many verses as the year doth of weeks, and hath like the year, its summer and winter. The summer part is the former; wherein, the church having reaped a most rich crop (the best blessings of Heaven and earth) the Psalmist breaketh forth into the praises of their gracious Benefactor, *I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever*: so it begins, and so he goeth on a great way. Who now would expect anything but mercies, and singing, and summer all the way? But summer ceaseth, and winter commences, at Ps 89:38: *But thou hast cast off and abhorred, thou hast been wroth, with thine anointed*. Mercies and singing are now turned into troubles and mourning. But nothing shall you hear but bitter querimonies and expostulations till you come to the last verse. There the good man's come to himself again. Though God were angry with his people, he cannot part with God in discontent. Though God had laden them with crosses, he lifts up his head, and presents God with blessing; *Blessed be the Lord forevermore. Amen, and Amen*. He blesseth him as well for winter as for summer, for troubles as for mercies. And thus the last verse of Psalm having as much affinity with the first in matter, as the last day of the year hath with the first in season; if we circle the Psalm, and bring both ends together, we find a fit resemblance between the year and it. The text is one of the Psalmist's winter drops; a black line from that pen, which erstwhile was so filled with joy, and wrote nothing but rubrics. He complains in the next precedent verse, of the brevity of his own life (it was like a winter's day, very short); in this, of the instability of man's life; as though he had said, I am not the only mortal. Other men's lives, though haply clothed with more comforts than mine, are altogether as mortal as mine; for his interrogations are equivalent to strong negations. As to *see sleep* is to sleep; so to *see or taste death*, is to die. There is no

surviving such a sight Death says, as God once to Moses, "There shall no man *see me and live.*" Ex 33:20. --*Thomas Du-gard, in a Funeral Sermon, 1648.*

**Verse 48.** Death spares no *rank*, no *condition* of men. Kings as well as subjects, princes as well as the meanest rustics are liable to this fatal stroke. The lofty cedars and low shrubs; palaces and cottages are alike here. Indeed, we read that Julius Caesar bid the master of the ship wherein he was sailing, take courage notwithstanding the boisterous tempest, because he had Caesar and his fortunes embarked in his vessel, as much as to say, the element on which they then were could not prove fatal to an emperor, to so great a one as he was. Our William surnamed Rufus said, he never heard of a king that was drowned. And Charles the Fifth, at the Battle of Tunis, being advised to retire when the great ordnance began to play, told them that it was never known that an emperor was slain with great shot, and so rushed into the battle. But this we are sure of, it was never known or heard that any king or crowned head escaped the blow of death at last. The sceptre cannot keep off `the arrows that fly by day, and the sickness which wastes at noonday; 'it is no screen, no guard against the shafts of death. We have heard of great tyrants and usurpers who vaunted that they had the power of life and death, and as absolutely disposed of men as Domitian did of flies; but we have heard likewise that in a short time (and generally the shorter the more furious they have been) their sceptres are fallen out of their hands; their crowns are toppled off their heads, and they are themselves snatched away by the King of Terrors. Or, if we speak of those royal personages that are mild and gentle, and like Vespasian are the darlings and delight of the people, yet these no less than others have their fatal hour, and their regal honour and majesty are laid in the dust. *The King doth not die*, may be a Common law maxim, but it is a falsehood according to the laws of God and Nature,

and the established constitution of heaven. For God himself who hath said, *Ye are gods*, hath also added, *Ye shall die like men*. In the *Escorial* the palace of the Kings of Spain, is their *cemetery* too; there their royal ashes lie. So in the place where the kings and queens of England are crowned, their predecessors are entombed: to tell them, as it were, that their crowns exempt them not from the grave, and that there is no greatness and splendour that can guard them from the arrest of death. He regards the rich and wealthy no more than the poor and necessitous: he snatches persons out of their mansion houses and hereditary seats, as well as out of almshouses and hospitals. His dominion is over masters as well as servants, parents as well as children, superiors as well as inferiors. --*John Edwards*.

**Verse 48.**

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,  
And all that beauty, all that wealth ever gave, Await alike the  
inevitable hour--

The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

Can storied urn, or animated bust,

Back to its mansions call the fleeting breath? Can Honour's voice  
provoke the silent dust,

Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of Death? --*Thomas Gray*, 1716-  
1771.

**Verse 50.** *How I do bear in my bosom the reproach*, etc. I take the reproaches of thy servants and thine anointed, (1) as if they reproached me in mine own particular; or, (2) in that they lie so heavy upon my heart; or, (3) in that I am resolved quietly to endure them, and to swallow them down in silence, as not being indeed able to shake them off; because in the eye of reason our condition is at present so contrary to what we waited for; or, (4) in that their

reproaches came not to his ears by hear say only, but were openly to his face cast as it were into his bosom. --*Arthur Jackson*.

**Verse 50.** I do bear in, my bosom the reproach, etc. The reproach of religion and of the godly doth lie near, and should lie near, the heart of every lively member of the church. --*David Dickson*.

**Verse 51.** *They have reproached the footsteps of thine anointed.* This phrase is obscure in diction, and therefore variously interpreted

1. Some by the *footsteps of Christ*, judge that his advent in the flesh is meant: others refer the words to David, and take the meaning to be, imitation of him. The first exposition yields this sense: Be mindful, O Lord, of the reproach of thy enemies wherewith they insult our expectation of thy Anointed, and scoff at his advent as if it would never come.

2. The second interpretation is this: Recollect, O Lord, what contempt thy enemies heap upon us on account of thy servant David, because we fondly cherish his memory and his example, and nourish the hope of thy covenant with him, clinging tenaciously thereto...Thirdly, this clause may be so interpreted that by *twbqe*, that is, the heel, we may understand the extremities of the Kingdom of Christ, of David. Thus we may imagine the enemies of God threw this in the teeth of the people of Israel, that they had already come to the end and extremity of the Kingdom of David. --*Musculus*.

**Verse 51** (*second clause*). The *Chaldee* has: "They have scoffed at the tardiness of Thy Messiah's footsteps." So *Kimchi*: "He delays so long, they say He will never come." Compare 2Pe 3:4,9. The Arabic *aqaba* is used in the sense of "delaying." --*William Kay*.

**Verse 51.** *The footsteps*, or foot soles, that is, the ways, life, actions, and sufferings, Ps 56:6 Ps 49:5. This referred to Christ, respecteth the oracle, Ge 3:15, that the Serpent should bruise the foot sole of the woman's seed; referred to Christians which follow his footsteps, in suffering and dying with him, that we may be glorified with him (1Pe 2:21 Ro 8:17); it notes the scandal of the Cross of Christ, "to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness." (1Co 1:23 1Pe 4:13-14.) The Chaldee understands it of the slackness of the footsteps. -- *Henry Ainsworth*.

**Verse 52.** *Blessed be the Lord for evermore. Amen, and Amen.* Victory begins to shine in the phrase, *Blessed be Jehovah for evermore. Amen, and Amen.* Some think that these words are not the words of the Psalmist, because they are of opinion that they do not agree with the preceding, but were written by another, or added by the Collector of the Psalms as a concluding doxology; or if the Psalmist wrote them, he did so merely in finishing his prayer. But it is a matter of the greatest moment; for it indicates the victory of faith, since he observes that after that grief, the reproach of the heel is gloriously removed that the Messiah may remain a victor for ever, having bruised the serpent's head, and taken away from him in perpetuity all his power of hurting. That this should certainly take place, he adds the seal of faith again and again: "*Amen, and Amen.*" - *-James Alting, 1618-1679.*

**Verse 52.** This doxology belongs alike to all the Psalms of the Third Book, and ought not to be treated as if it were merely the last verse of the Psalm to which it adjoins. It ought to be set forth in such a shape as would enable and invite God's people to sing it as a separate formula of praise, or in connection with any other Psalm. -- *William Binnie.*

**Verse 52.** As to the words *Amen and Amen*, I readily grant that they are here employed to mark the end of the third book of the Psalms. --  
*John Calvin.*

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## HINTS TO THE VILLAGE PREACHER

### **Verse 1.**

1. Mercies celebrated. When? --"for ever."
2. By whom? --by those who are the subjects of them.
3. Therefore they must live for ever to celebrate them.
4. Faithfulness declared. (a) To our own generation. (b) To succeeding generations by its influence upon others.

### **Verse 2. --**

#### 1. The Testimony.

(a) To the constancy of Mercy: (1.) builds up its trophies every moment. (2.) It preserves them for ever.

(b) To the constancy of Faithfulness. It remains as the ordinances of heaven.

2. Its Confirmation. "I have said", etc., said it,

- (a) Upon the ground of Scripture.
- (b) of experience.
- (c) of reason.
- (d) of observation of others.

### **Verses 3-4.**

1. The Covenant made. With whom? --with David and in him with David's Lord and Son. The true David--the chosen one--the servant of the Father in redemption.

2. For what? --

(a) for his seed. He should have a seed and that seed should be established.

(b) for himself, "his throne", etc.

3. The Covenant confirmed.

(a) By decree. "I have made", etc.

(b) By promise. "I will establish."

(c) By oath. "I have sworn."

**Verse 6.** --We have a comparison between God and the most excellent in heaven and earth--challenge both worlds.

1. The true God, sovereign of heaven and earth is incomparably great in his BEING and EXISTENCE;

(a) because his being is of himself *eternal*;



- (b) because he is a *perfect* being;
- (c) because he is *independent*;
- (d) because he is unchangeable.

2. God is incomparably great in his ATTRIBUTES and PERFECTIONS.

- (a) In his *holiness*;
- (b) in his *wisdom* and *knowledge*;
- (c) in his *power*;
- (d) in his *justice*;
- (e) in his patience;
- (f) in his *love* and *goodness*.

3. God is incomparably great in his WORKS--creation; providence; redemption, and human salvation. --*Theophilus Jones*, 1830.

**Verse 6.** --The incomparableness of God, in his Being, Attributes, Works, and Word. --*Swinnock*. (Nichol's Edition of Swinnock's Works, Vol. 4, pp. 373-508.)

**Verses 6-7.**

1. In creation God is far above other beings. Ps 89:6.

2. In Redemption he is far above himself in creation. Ps 89:7.

**Verses 9-10.** God's present rule in the midst of confusion, and rebellion; and his ultimate overthrow of all adverse forces.

**Verse 11.**

1. God's possession of heaven, the model of his possession of earth.
2. God's possession of earth most certain, and its manifestation in the future most sure.
3. The course of action suggested to his people by the two facts.

**Verse 12.** The joy of creation in its Creator.

**Verse 14.**

1. The Equity of the divine government--"justice", etc. No creature can eventually be unjustly dealt with under his dominion, and his kingdom ruleth over all.
2. The Sovereignty of the divine government. Truth before mercy. Mercy founded upon truth. "Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob and the mercy to Abraham." The covenant made in mercy to Abraham is fulfilled in truth to Jacob.

**Verse 15.**

1. The gospel is a joyful sound. Good tidings, etc.
2. It is a joyful sound to those who know it, hear it, believe it, love it, obey it.
3. They to whom it is a joyful sound are blessed. "They shall walk", etc.

**Verse 15.**

1. There is a theoretical knowledge of the gospel.
  2. An experimental knowledge, and,
  3. A practical knowledge
- W. Drasfield*, 1859.

**Verse 16.** --

1. Exultation.

(a) "In thy name", etc., as rich in mercy as the God of salvation--of all grace--of all consolation.

(b) At what season--"all the day", morning, noon, and night.

2. Exaltation. "In thy righteousness", etc.

(a) How not exalted. Not in their own righteousness.

(b) How exalted. "In *thy*", etc. Procured for them-- by a divine person (*thy*) --imputed to them. Ours, though thine. The righteousness of God as God could not exalt us, but his righteousness as God man can. Exalted above hell, above earth, above Paradise, above angels. Exalted to friends of God-- children of God--one with God, to heaven.

**Verse 16.** (*second clause*). --Consider,

1. What the believer is exalted *above* or *from*, by God's righteousness.

(a) It exalts him above the law.

(b) Above the world.

- (c) Above the power and malice of Satan.
- (d) Above death.
- (e) Above all accusations (Ro 8:33-34.)

2. *To what happiness or dignity the believer is exalted by virtue of that righteousness.*

- a) To a state of peace and reconciliation with God.
  - (b) To sonship.
  - (c) To fellowship and familiarity with God, and access to him.
  - (d) And finally, to a state of endless glory.
- E. Erskine.*

### **Verse 17.**

1. The blessedness of the righteous.

- (a) Their internal glory. Reliance upon divine strength.
- (b) Their internal honour. "In thy favour", etc.

2. The participation in that blessedness. The *their* of the people of God becomes *our*. Their strength our horn. Happy they, who, with respect to all the privileges of the saints, can thus turn *their* into *our*.

### **Verse 17.**

- 1. Consider our natural weakness.
- 2. Consider our strength in God.
- 3. Give God the glory of it.

### **Verse 18.**

1. Jehovah--his power, self existence, and majesty--our defence.
2. The Holy One of Israel--his character, covenant character, and unity--our government.

**Verse 19.**

1. The work required. "Help."

(a) By whom? By God himself.

(b) For what? To reconcile God to man, and man to God.

2. The persons selected for this work.

(a) Human. "Chosen out of the people."

(b) Divine. "Thy Holy One."

3. His qualifications for the work.

(a) His own ability for the office. "One that is mighty."

(b) His appointment to it by God. "I have laid." etc. "I have chosen", etc.

**Verse 19.** (*last clause*). Election, extraction, exaltation.

**Verses 20-21.**

1. The Messiah would be of the seed of David. The true David.

2. He would be a servant of the Father. "My servant."

3. He would be consecrated to his office by God. "With my holy oil", etc.

4. He would perfectly fulfil it. "With whom my hand", etc.

5. He would be sustained in it by the Father. "Mine arm", etc.

**Verse 22-23.**

1. A prophecy of the conflict of the Messiah with Satan. Satan could not exact any debt or homage for him.

2. Of his refutation of his enemies. "I will beat down", etc. The Scribes and Pharisees were beaten down before his face.

3. Of the destruction of their city and nation. "And plague them", etc.

**Verse 26.** Our Lord's filial spirit, and how it was displayed.

**Verse 29.**

1. The subjects of Messiah's reign. "His seed."

(a) For union--his seed.

(b) For resemblance.

(c) For multitude.

2. The duration of his reign.

(a) They for ever one with him.

(b) He for ever on the throne.

**Verses 30-34.**

1. The persons referred to. "His children." "Ye are all the children", etc.

2. The supposition concerning them. "If his children forsake", etc.

(a) They may possibly--may fall, though not fall away.

(b) They will probably, because they are far from being perfect.

(c) They have actually: as David himself and others.

3. The threatening founded upon that supposition.

(a) Specified--"the rod--stripes." They shall smart for it sooner or later.

(b) Certified. "Then will I."

4. The qualification of the threatening. "Nevertheless", etc.

(a) The nevertheless characterized. Lovingkindness not removed, etc.

(b) Emphasised. The rod may seem to be in anger, nevertheless, etc.

There is,

1. An if.

2. A then.

3. A nevertheless.

### **Verse 39.**

1. Providence may often seem to be at variance with promises.

2. Promises are never at variance with providence. It is the covenant of thy servant and his crown still.

**Verse 39.** How the throne of King Jesus may be profaned.

**Verse 40.**

1. What God had done. "Broken down", etc.
2. What he had not done. Not taken away sorrow for his departure and desire for his return.

**Verse 43.** Cases in which the sword of the gospel appears to have its edge turned.

**Verse 44-45.**

1. A prophecy that the Messiah would be meek and lowly. "Made his glory to cease."
2. Would become a servant to the Father. "Cast his throne down", etc.
3. Would be cut off in the midst of his days. "The days of his youth", etc.
4. That he would die an ignominious death. "Hast covered him", etc.

**Verse 45.** The excellence of the first days of Christianity, and in what respect their glory has departed from us.

**Verse 46.** The hand of God is to be acknowledged.

1. In the nature of affliction. "Wilt thou hide thyself", etc.
2. In the duration of affliction. "How long, Lord?"



3. In the severity of affliction. Wrath burning like fire.

4. In the issue of affliction. How long? for ever? In all these respects the words are applicable both to Christ and to his people.

**Verse 46.** *Remember.* The prayer of the dying thief, the troubled believer, the persecuted Christian.

**Verse 47.**

1. An appeal to divine goodness. "Remember", etc. Let not my life be all trouble and sorrow.

2. To divine wisdom. "Wherefore", etc. Was man made only to be miserable? Will not man have been made in vain if his life be but short, and that short life be nothing but sorrow?

**Verse 52.**

1. The voice. "Blessed", etc. In himself in all his works and ways--in his judgments as well as in his mercies-- as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ--"for evermore."

2. The echo, "Amen and amen." Amen, says the church on earth--says the church in heaven--say the angels of God--says the whole holy and happy universe--says eternity past and eternity to come.

## **WORKS UPON THE EIGHTY-NINTH PSALM**

**In the Works of John Boys, folio, pp. 805-9, there is an Exposition of a portion of this Psalm.**

**FROM BETHLEHEM TO JORDAN by Alfred Edersheim**

Book 2 — From the Manger in Bethlehem to the Baptism in Jordan in Jerusalem When Herod Reigned

In the Fifteenth Year of Tiberius Caesar and Under the Pontificate of Annas and Caiaphas

**IN THE FIFTEENTH YEAR OF TIBERIUS CAESAR AND UNDER THE PONTIFICATE OF ANNAS AND CAIAPHAS  
A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS  
(St. Matthew 3:1-12; St. Mark 1:2-8; St. Luke 3:1-18.)**

THERE is something grand, even awful, in the almost absolute silence which lies upon the thirty years between the Birth and the first Messianic Manifestation of Jesus. In a narrative like that of the Gospels, this must have been designed; and, if so, affords presumptive evidence of the authenticity of what follows, and is intended to teach, that what had preceded concerned only the inner History of Jesus, and the preparation of the Christ. At last that solemn silence was broken by an appearance, a proclamation, a rite, and a ministry as startling as that of Elijah had been. In many respects, indeed, the two messengers and their times bore singular likeness. It was to a society secure, prosperous, and luxurious, yet in imminent danger of perishing from hidden, festering disease; and to

a religious community which presented the appearance of hopeless perversion, and yet contained the germs of a possible regeneration, that both Elijah and John the Baptist came. Both suddenly appeared to threaten terrible judgment, but also to open unthought-of possibilities of good. And, as if to deepen still more the impression of this contrast, both appeared in a manner unexpected, and even antithetic to the habits of their contemporaries. John came suddenly out of the wilderness of Judea, as Elijah from the wilds of Gilead; John bore the same strange ascetic appearance as his predecessor; the message of John was the counterpart of that of Elijah; his baptism that of Elijah's novel rite on Mount Carmel. And, as if to make complete the parallelism, with all of memory and hope which it awakened, even the more minute details surrounding the life of Elijah found their counterpart in that of John. Yet history never repeats itself. It fulfils in its development that of which it gave indication at its commencement. Thus, the history of John the Baptist was the fulfilment of that of Elijah in 'the fulness of time.'

For, alike in the Roman world and in Palestine, the time had fully come; not, indeed, in the sense of any special expectancy, but of absolute need. The reign of Augustus marked, not only the climax, but the crisis, of Roman history. Whatever of good or of evil the ancient world contained, had become fully ripe. As regarded politics, philosophy, religion, and society, the utmost limits had been reached. <sup>1</sup> Beyond them lay, as only alternatives, ruin or regeneration. It was felt that the boundaries of the Empire could be no further extended, and that henceforth the highest aim must be to preserve what had been conquered. The destinies of Rome were in the hands of one man, who was at the same time general-in-chief of a standing army of about three hundred and forty thousand men, head of a Senate (now sunk into a mere court for registering the commands of Cesar), and High-Priest of a religion, of which the

highest expression was the apotheosis of the State in the person of the Emperor. Thus, all power within, without, and above lay in his hands. Within the city, which in one short reign was transformed from brick into marble, were, side by side, the most abject misery and almost boundless luxury. Of a population of about two millions, well-nigh one half were slaves; and, of the rest, the greater part either freedmen and their descendants, or foreigners. Each class contributed its share to the common decay. Slavery was not even what we know it, but a seething mass of cruelty and oppression on the one side, and of cunning and corruption on the other. More than any other cause, it contributed to the ruin of Roman society. The freedmen, who had very often acquired their liberty by the most disreputable courses, and had prospered in them, combined in shameless manner the vices of the free with the vileness of the slave. The foreigners - especially Greeks and Syrians - who crowded the city, poisoned the springs of its life by the corruption which they brought. The free citizens were idle, dissipated, sunken; their chief thoughts of the theatre and the arena; and they were mostly supported at the public cost. While, even in the time of Augustus, more than two hundred thousand persons were thus maintained by the State, what of the old Roman stock remained was rapidly decaying, partly from corruption, but chiefly from the increasing cessation of marriage, and the nameless abominations of what remained of family-life.

The state of the provinces was in every respect more favourable. But it was the settled policy of the Empire, which only too surely succeeded, to destroy all separate nationalities, or rather to absorb and to Grecianise all. The only real resistance came from the Jews. Their tenacity was religious, and, even in its extreme of intolerant exclusiveness, served a most important Providential purpose. And so Rome became to all the centre of attraction, but also of fast-

spreading destructive corruption. Yet this unity also, and the common bond of the Greek language, served another important Providential purpose. So did, in another direction, the conscious despair of any possible internal reformation. This, indeed, seemed the last word of all the institutions in the Roman world: It is not in me! Religion, philosophy, and society had passed through every stage, to that of despair. Without tracing the various phases of ancient thought, it may be generally said that, in Rome at least, the issue lay between Stoicism and Epicureanism. The one flattered its pride, the other gratified its sensuality; the one was in accordance with the original national character, the other with its later decay and corruption. Both ultimately led to atheism and despair - the one, by turning all higher aspirations self-ward, the other, by quenching them in the enjoyment of the moment; the one, by making the extinction of all feeling and self-deification, the other, the indulgence of every passion and the worship of matter, its ideal.

That, under such conditions, all real belief in a personal continuance after death must have ceased among the educated classes, needs not demonstration. If the older Stoics held that, after death, the soul would continue for some time a separate existence - in the case of sages till the general destruction of the world by fire, it was the doctrine of most of their successors that, immediately after death, the soul returned into 'the world-soul' of which it was part. But even this hope was beset by so many doubts and misgivings, as to make it practically without influence or comfort. Cicero was the only one who, following Plato, defended the immortality of the soul, while the Peripatetics denied the existence of a soul, and leading Stoics at least its continuance after death. But even Cicero writes as one overwhelmed by doubts. With his contemporaries this doubt deepened into absolute despair, the only comfort lying in present indulgence of the passions. Even among the Greeks, who were most

tenacious of belief in the non-extinction of the individual, the practical upshot was the same. The only healthier tendency, however mixed with error, came from the Neo-Platonic School, which accordingly offered a point of contact between ancient philosophy and the new faith.

In such circumstances, anything like real religion was manifestly impossible. Rome tolerated, and, indeed, incorporated, all national rites. But among the populace religion had degenerated into abject superstition. In the East, much of it consisted of the vilest rites; while, among the philosophers, all religions were considered equally false or equally true - the outcome of ignorance, or else the unconscious modifications of some one fundamental thought. The only religion on which the State insisted was the deification and worship of the Emperor. <sup>2</sup> These apotheoses attained almost incredible development. Soon not only the Emperors, but their wives, paramours, children, and the creatures of their vilest lusts, were deified; nay, any private person might attain that distinction, if the survivors possessed sufficient means. <sup>3</sup> Mingled with all this was an increasing amount of superstition - by which term some understood the worship of foreign gods, the most part the existence of fear in religion. The ancient Roman religion had long given place to foreign rites, the more mysterious and unintelligible the more enticing. It was thus that Judaism made its converts in Rome; its chief recommendation with many being its contrast to the old, and the unknown possibilities which its seemingly incredible doctrines opened. Among the most repulsive symptoms of the general religious decay may be reckoned prayers for the death of a rich relative, or even for the satisfaction of unnatural lusts, along with horrible blasphemies when such prayers remained unanswered. We may here contrast the spirit of the Old and New Testaments with such sentiments as this, on the tomb of a child: 'To the unjust gods who

robbed me of life;' or on that of a girl of twenty: 'I lift my hands against the god who took me away, innocent as I am.'

It would be unsavoury to describe how far the worship of indecency was carried; how public morals were corrupted by the mimic representations of everything that was vile, and even by the pandering of a corrupt art. The personation of gods, oracles, divination, dreams, astrology, magic, necromancy, and theurgy, 4 all contributed to the general decay. It has been rightly said, that the idea of conscience, as we understand it, was unknown to heathenism. Absolute right did not exist. Might was right. The social relations exhibited, if possible, even deeper corruption. The sanctity of marriage had ceased. Female dissipation and the general dissoluteness led at last to an almost entire cessation of marriage. Abortion, and the exposure and murder of newly-born children, were common and tolerated; unnatural vices, which even the greatest philosophers practised, if not advocated, attained proportions which defy description.

But among these sad signs of the times three must be specially mentioned: the treatment of slaves; the bearing towards the poor; and public amusements. The slave was entirely unprotected; males and females were exposed to nameless cruelties, compared to which death by being thrown to the wild beasts, or fighting in the arena, might seem absolute relief. Sick or old slaves were cast out to perish from want. But what the influence of the slaves must have been on the free population, and especially upon the young - whose tutors they generally were - may readily be imagined. The heartlessness towards the poor who crowded the city is another well-known feature of ancient Roman society. Of course, there was neither hospitals, nor provision for the poor; charity and brotherly love in their every manifestation are purely Old and New Testament ideas. But even

bestowal of the smallest alms on the needy was regarded as very questionable; best, not to afford them the means of protracting a useless existence. Lastly, the account which Seneca has to give of what occupied and amused the idle multitude - for all manual labour, except agriculture, was looked upon with utmost contempt - horrified even himself. And so the only escape which remained for the philosopher, the satiated, or the miserable, seemed the power of self-destruction! What is worse, the noblest spirits of the time of self-destruction! What is worse, the noblest spirits of the time felt, that the state of things was utterly hopeless. Society could not reform itself; philosophy and religion had nothing to offer: they had been tried and found wanting. Seneca longed for some hand from without to lift up from the mire of despair; Cicero pictured the enthusiasm which would greet the embodiment of true virtue, should it ever appear on earth; Tacitus declared human life one great farce, and expressed his conviction that the Roman world lay under some terrible curse. All around, despair, conscious need, and unconscious longing. Can greater contrast be imagined, than the proclamation of a coming Kingdom of God amid such a world; or clearer evidence be afforded of the reality of this Divine message, than that it came to seek and to save that which was thus lost? One synchronism, as remarkable as that of the Star in the East and the Birth of the Messiah, here claims the reverent attention of the student of history. On the 19th of December a.d. 69, the Roman Capitol, with its ancient sanctuaries, was set on fire. Eight months later, on the 9th of Ab a.d. 70, the Temple of Jerusalem was given to the flames. It is not a coincidence but a conjunction, for upon the ruins of heathenism and of apostate Judaism was the Church of Christ to be reared.

A silence, even more complete than that concerning the early life of Jesus, rests on the thirty years and more, which intervened between the birth and the open forthshowing 5 of John in his character as



Forerunner of the Messiah. Only his outward and inward development, and his being 'in the deserts,' 6 are briefly indicated. 7 The latter, assuredly, not in order to learn from the *Essenes*, 8 but to attain really, in lonely fellowship with God, what they sought externally. It is characteristic that, while Jesus could go straight from the home and workshop of Nazareth to the Baptism of Jordan, His Forerunner required so long and peculiar preparation: characteristic of the difference of their Persons and Mission, characteristic also of the greatness of the work to be inaugurated. St. Luke furnishes precise notices of the time of the Baptist's public appearance - not merely to fix the exact chronology, which would not have required so many details, but for a higher purpose. For, they indicate, more clearly than the most elaborate discussion, the fitness of the moment for the Advent of 'the Kingdom of Heaven.' For the first time since the Babylonish Captivity, the foreigner, the Chief of the hated Roman Empire - according to the Rabbis, the fourth beast of Daniel's vision 9 - was absolute and undisputed master of Judea; and the chief religious office divided between two, equally unworthy of its functions. And it deserves, at least, notice, that of the Rulers mentioned by St. Luke, Pilate entered on his office 10 only shortly before the public appearance of John, and that they all continued till after the Crucifixion of Christ. There was thus, so to speak, a continuity of these powers during the whole Messianic period.

As regards Palestine, the ancient kingdom of Herod was now divided into four parts, Judea being under the direct administration of Rome, two other tetrarchies under the rule of Herod's sons (Herod Antipas and Philip), while the small principality of Abilene was governed by Lysanias. 11 Of the latter no details can be furnished, nor are they necessary in this history. It is otherwise as regards the sons of Herod, and especially the character of the Roman government at that time.

Herod Antipas, whose rule extended over forty-three years, reigned over Galilee and Pera - the districts which were respectively the principal sphere of the Ministry of Jesus and of John the Baptist. Like his brother Archelaus, Herod Antipas possessed in an even aggravated form most of the vices, without any of the greater qualities, of his father. Of deeper religious feelings or convictions he was entirely destitute, though his conscience occasionally misgave, if it did not restrain, him. The inherent weakness of his character left him in the absolute control of his wife, to the final ruin of his fortunes. He was covetous, avaricious, luxurious, and utterly dissipated suspicious, and with a good deal of that fox-cunning which, especially in the East, often forms the sum total of state-craft. Like his father, he indulged a taste for building - always taking care to propitiate Rome by dedicating all to the Emperor. The most extensive of his undertakings was the building, in 22 a.d., of the city of Tiberias, at the upper end of the Lake of Galilee. The site was under the disadvantage of having formerly been a burying-place, which, as implying Levitical uncleanness, for some time deterred pious Jews from settling there. Nevertheless, it rose in great magnificence from among the reeds which had but lately covered the neighbourhood (the ensigns armorial of the city were 'reeds'). Herod Antipas made it his residence, and built there a strong castle and a palace of unrivalled splendour. The city, which was peopled chiefly by adventurers, was mainly Grecian, and adorned with an amphitheatre, of which the ruins can still be traced.

A happier account can be given of Philip, the son of Herod the Great and Cleopatra of Jerusalem. He was undoubtedly the best of Herod's sons. He showed, indeed, the same abject submission as the rest of his family to the Roman Emperor, after whom he named the city of Cesarea Philippi, which he built at the sources of the Jordan; just as he changed the name of Bethsaida, a village of which he made an

opulent city, into Julias, after the daughter of Augustus. But he was a moderate and just ruler, and his reign of thirty-seven years contrasted favourably with that of his kinsmen. The land was quiet and prosperous, and the people contented and happy.

As regards the Roman rule, matters had greatly changed for the worse since the mild sway of Augustus, under which, in the language of Philo, no one throughout the Empire dared to molest the Jews. <sup>12</sup> The only innovations to which Israel had then to submit were, the daily sacrifices for the Emperor and the Roman people, offerings on festive days, prayers for them in the Synagogues, and such participation in national joy or sorrow as their religion allowed. <sup>13</sup>

It was far other when Tiberius succeeded to the Empire, and Judea was a province. Merciless harshness characterised the administration of Palestine; while the Emperor himself was bitterly hostile to Judaism and the Jews, and that although, personally, openly careless of all religion. <sup>14</sup> Under his reign the persecution of the Roman Jews occurred, and Palestine suffered almost to the verge of endurance. The first Procurator whom Tiberius appointed over Judea, changed the occupancy of the High-Priesthood four times, till he found in Caiaphas a sufficiently submissive instrument of Roman tyranny. The exactions, and the reckless disregard of all Jewish feelings and interests, might have been characterised as reaching the extreme limit, if worse had not followed when Pontius Pilate succeeded to the procuratorship. Venality, violence, robbery, persecutions, wanton malicious insults, judicial murders without even the formality of a legal process - and cruelty, such are the charges brought against his administration. <sup>15</sup> If former governors had, to some extent, respected the religious scruples of the Jews, Pilate set them purposely at defiance; and this not only once, but

again and again, in Jerusalem, 16 in Galilee, 17 and even in Samaria, 18 until the Emperor himself interposed. 19

Such, then, was the political condition of the land, when John appeared to preach the near Advent of a Kingdom with which Israel associated all that was happy and glorious, even beyond the dreams of the religious enthusiast. And equally loud was the call for help in reference to those who held chief spiritual rule over the people. St. Luke significantly joins together, as the highest religious authority in the land, the names of Annas and Caiaphas. 20 The former had been appointed by Quirinius. After holding the Pontificate for nine years, he was deposed, and succeeded by others, of whom the fourth was his son-in-law Caiaphas. The character of the High-Priests during the whole of that period is described in the Talmud 21 in terrible language. And although there is no evidence that 'the house of Annas' 22 was guilty of the same gross self-indulgence, violence, 23 luxury, and even public indecency, 24 as some of their successors, they are included in the woes pronounced on the corrupt leaders of the priesthood, whom the Sanctuary is represented as bidding depart from the sacred precincts, which their presence defiled. 25 It deserves notice, that the special sin with which the house of Annas is charged is that of 'whispering' - or hissing like vipers - which seems to refer 26 to private influence on the judges in their administration of justice, whereby 'morals were corrupted, judgment perverted and the Shekhinah withdrawn from Israel.' 27 In illustration of this, we recall the terrorism which prevented Sanhedrists from taking the part of Jesus, 28 and especially the violence which seems to have determined the final action of the Sanhedrin, 29 against which not only such men as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, but even a Gamaliel, would feel themselves powerless. But although the expression 'High-Priest' appears sometimes to have been used in a general sense, as designating the sons of the High-Priests, and even

the principal members of their families, 30 31 there could, of course, be only one actual High-Priest. The conjunction of the two names of Annas and Caiaphas 32 probably indicates that, although Annas was deprived of the Pontificate, he still continued to preside over the Sanhedrin - a conclusion not only borne out by Acts iv. 6, where Annas appears as the actual President, and by the terms in which Caiaphas is spoken of, as merely 'one of them,' 33 but by the part which Annas took in the final condemnation of Jesus. 34

Such a combination of political and religious distress, surely, constituted the time of Israel's utmost need. As yet, no attempt had been made by the people to right themselves by armed force. In these circumstances, the cry that the Kingdom of Heaven was near at hand, and the call to preparation for it, must have awakened echoes throughout the land, and startled the most careless and unbelieving. It was, according to St. Luke's exact statement, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cesar - reckoning, as provincials would do, 35 from his co-regency with Augustus (which commenced two years before his sole reign), in the year 26 a.d. 36 According to our former computation, Jesus would then be in His thirtieth year. 37 The scene of John's first public appearance was in 'the wilderness of Judea,' that is, the wild, desolate district around the mouth of the Jordan. We know not whether John baptized in this place, 38 nor yet how long he continued there; but we are expressly told, that his stay was not confined to that locality. 39 Soon afterwards we find him at Bethabara, 40 which is farther up the stream. The outward appearance and the habits of the Messenger corresponded to the character and object of his Mission. Neither his dress nor his food was that of the Essenes; 41 and the former, at least, like that of Elijah, 42 43 whose mission he was now to 'fulfil.' This was evinced alike by what he preached, and by the new symbolic rite, from which he derived the name of 'Baptist.' The grand burden of his message

was: the announcement of the approach of 'the Kingdom of Heaven,' and the needed preparation of his hearers for that Kingdom. The latter he sought, positively, by admonition, and negatively, by warnings, while he directed all to the Coming One, in Whom that Kingdom would become, so to speak, individualised. Thus, from the first, it was 'the good news of the Kingdom,' to which all else in John's preaching was but subsidiary.

Concerning this 'Kingdom of Heaven,' which was the great message of John, and the great work of Christ Himself, 44 we may here say, that it is the whole Old Testament *sublimated*, and the whole New Testament *realised*. The idea of it did not lie hidden in the Old, to be opened up in the New Testament - as did the mystery of its realisation. 45 But this rule of heaven and Kingship of Jehovah was the very substance of the Old Testament; the object of the calling and mission of Israel; the meaning of all its ordinances, whether civil or religious; 46 the underlying idea of all its institutions. 47 It explained alike the history of the people, the dealings of God with them, and the prospects opened up by the prophets. Without it the Old Testament could not be understood; it gave perpetuity to its teaching, and dignity to its representations. This constituted alike the real contrast between Israel and the nations of antiquity, and Israel's real title to distinction. Thus the whole Old Testament was the preparatory presentation of the rule of heaven and of the Kingship of its Lord.

But preparatory not only in the sense of typical, but also in that of inchoative. Even the twofold hindrance - internal and external - which 'the Kingdom' encountered, indicated this. The former arose from the resistance of Israel to their King; the latter from the opposition of the surrounding kingdoms of this world. All the more intense became the longing through thousands of years, that these

hindrances might be swept away by the Advent of the promised Messiah, Who would permanently establish (by His spirit) the right relationship between the King and His Kingdom, by bringing in an everlasting righteousness, and also cast down existing barriers, by calling the kingdoms of this world to be the Kingdom of our God. This would, indeed, be the Advent of the Kingdom of God, such as had been the glowing hope held out by Zechariah, 48 49 the glorious vision beheld by Daniel. 50 51 Three ideas especially did this Kingdom of God imply: *universality*, *heavenliness*, and *permanency*. Wide as God's domain would be His Dominion; holy, as heaven in contrast to earth, and God to man, would be his character; and triumphantly lasting its continuance. Such was the teaching of the Old Testament, and the great hope of Israel. It scarcely needs mental compass, only moral and spiritual capacity, to see its matchless grandeur, in contrast with even the highest aspirations of heathenism, and the blanched ideas of modern culture.

How imperfectly Israel understood this Kingdom, our previous investigations have shown. In truth, the men of that period possessed only the term - as it were, the form. What explained its meaning, filled, and fulfilled it, came once more from heaven. Rabbinism and Alexandrianism kept alive the thought of it; and in their own way filled the soul with its longing - just as the distress in church and State carried the need of it to every heart with the keenness of anguish. As throughout this history, the *form* was of that time; the substance and the spirit were of Him Whose coming was the Advent of that Kingdom. Perhaps the nearest approach to it lay in the higher aspirations of the Nationalist party, only that it sought their realisation, not spiritually, but outwardly. Taking the sword, it perished by the sword. It was probably to this that both Pilate and Jesus referred in that memorable question: 'Art Thou then a King?'

to which our Lord, unfolding the deepest meaning of His mission, replied: 'My Kingdom is not of this world: if My Kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight.' 52

According to the Rabbinic views of the time, the terms 'Kingdom,' 'Kingdom of heaven,' 53 and 'Kingdom of God' (in the Targum on Micah iv. 7 'Kingdom of Jehovah'), were equivalent. In fact, the word 'heaven' was very often used instead of 'God,' so as to avoid unduly familiarising the ear with the Sacred Name. 54 This, probably, accounts for the exclusive use of the expression 'Kingdom of Heaven' in the Gospel by St. Matthew. 55 And the term did imply a contrast to earth, as the expression 'the Kingdom of God' did to this world. The consciousness of its contrast to earth or the world was distinctly expressed in Rabbinic writings. 56

This 'Kingdom of Heaven,' or 'of God,' must, however, be distinguished from such terms as 'the Kingdom of the Messiah' (*Malkhutha dimeshicha* 57), 'the future age (world) of the Messiah' (*Alma deathey dimeshicha* 58), 'the days of the Messiah,' 'the age to come' (*sœculum futurum*, the *Athid labho* 59 - both this and the previous expression 60), 'the end of days,' 61 and 'the end of the extremity of days' *Soph Egebh Yomaya* 62). This is the more important, since the 'Kingdom of Heaven' has so often been confounded with the period of its triumphant manifestation in 'the days,' or in 'the Kingdom, of the Messiah.' Between the Advent and the final manifestation of 'the Kingdom,' Jewish expectancy placed a temporary obscuration of the Messiah. 63 Not His first appearance, but His triumphant manifestation, was to be preceded by the so-called 'sorrows of the Messiah' (the *Chebhley shel Mashiach*), 'the tribulations of the latter days.' 64



A review of many passages on the subject shows that, in the Jewish mind the expression 'Kingdom of Heaven' referred, not so much to any particular period, as in general to the *Rule of God* - as acknowledged, manifested, and eventually perfected. Very often it is the equivalent for personal acknowledgment of God: the taking upon oneself of the 'yoke' of 'the Kingdom,' or of the commandments - the former preceding and conditioning the latter. 65 Accordingly, the Mishnah 66 gives this as the reason why, in the collection of Scripture passages which forms the prayer called '*Shema*,' 67 the confession, Deut. vi. 4 &c., precedes the admonition, Deut. xi. 13 &c., because a man takes upon himself first the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, and afterwards that of the commandments.

And in this sense, the repetition of this Shema, as the personal acknowledgment of the Rule of Jehovah, is itself often designated as 'taking upon oneself the Kingdom of Heaven.' 68 Similarly, the putting on of phylacteries, and the washing of hands, are also described as taking upon oneself the yoke of the Kingdom of God. 69 To give other instances: Israel is said to have taken up the yoke of the Kingdom of God at Mount Sinai; 70 the children of Jacob at their last interview with their father; 71 and Isaiah on his call to the prophetic office, 72 where it is also noted that this must be done willingly and gladly. On the other hand, the sons of Eli and the sons of Ahab are said to have cast off the Kingdom of Heaven. 73 While thus the acknowledgment of the Rule of God, both in profession and practice, was considered to constitute the Kingdom of God, its full manifestation was expected only in the time of the Advent of Messiah. Thus in the Targum on Isaiah xl. 9, the words 'Behold your God!' are paraphrased: 'The Kingdom of your God is revealed.' Similarly, 74 we read: 'When the time approaches that the Kingdom of Heaven shall be manifested, then shall be fulfilled that "the Lord shall be King over all the earth."' 75 76 On the other hand, the

unbelief of Israel would appear in that they would reject these three things: the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of the House of David, and the building of the Temple, according to the prediction in Hos. iii. 5. 77 It follows that, after the period of unbelief, the Messianic deliverances and blessings of the 'Athid Labho,' or future age, were expected. But the final completion of all still remained for the 'Olam Habba,' or world to come. And that there is a distinction between the time of the Messiah and this 'world to come' is frequently indicated in Rabbinic writings. 78

As we pass from the Jewish ideas of the time to the teaching of the New Testament, we feel that while there is *complete change of spirit*, the form in which the idea of the Kingdom of Heaven is presented is substantially similar. Accordingly, we must dismiss the notion that the expression refers to the Church, whether visible (according to the Roman Catholic view) or invisible (according to certain Protestant writers). 79 'The Kingdom of God,' or Kingly Rule of God, is an *objective fact*. The visible Church can only be the *subjective* attempt at its outward realisation, of which the invisible Church is the true counterpart. When Christ says, 80 that 'except a man be born from above, he cannot see the Kingdom of God,' He teaches, in opposition to the Rabbinic representation of how 'the Kingdom' was taken up, that a man cannot even comprehend that glorious idea of the Reign of God, and of becoming, by conscious self-surrender, one of His subjects, except he be first born from above. Similarly, the meaning of Christ's further teaching on this subject 81 seems to be that, except a man be born of water (profession, with baptism 82 as its symbol) and the Spirit, he cannot really enter into the fellowship of that Kingdom.

In fact, an analysis of 119 passages in the New Testament where the expression 'Kingdom' occurs, shows that it means *the rule of God*; 83

which was *manifested in and through Christ*; 84 is *apparent in 'the Church*;' 85 *gradually develops amidst hindrances*; 86 is *triumphant at the second coming of Christ* 87 ('the end'); and, finally, *perfected in the world to come*. 88 Thus viewed, the announcement of John of the near Advent of this Kingdom had deepest meaning, although, as so often in the case of prophetism, the stages intervening between the Advent of the Christ and the triumph of that Kingdom seem to have been hidden from the preacher. He came to call Israel to submit to the Reign of God, about to be manifested in Christ. Hence, on the one hand, he called them to repentance - a 'change of mind' - with all that this implied; and, on the other, pointed them to the Christ, in the exaltation of His Person and Office. Or rather, the two combined might be summed up in the call: 'Change your mind', repent, which implies, not only a turning from the past, but a turning to the Christ in newness of mind. 89 And thus the symbolic action by which this preaching was accompanied might be designated 'the baptism of repentance.'

The account given by St. Luke bears, on the face of it, that it was a summary, not only of the first, but of all John's preaching. 90 The very presence of his hearers at this call to, and baptism of, repentance, gave point to his words. Did they who, notwithstanding their sins, 91 lived in such security of carelessness and self-righteousness, really understand and fear the final consequences of resistance to the coming 'Kingdom'? If so, theirs must be a repentance not only in profession, but of heart and mind, such as would yield fruit, both good and visible. Or else did they imagine that, according to the common notion of the time, the vials of wrath were to be poured out only on the Gentiles, 92 while they, as Abraham's children, were sure of escape - in the words of the Talmud, that 'the night' (Is. xxi. 12) was 'only to the nations of the world, but the morning to Israel?' 93

For, no principle was more fully established in the popular conviction, than that all Israel had part in the world to come (Sanh. x. 1), and this, specifically, because of their connection with Abraham. This appears not only from the New Testament, 94 from Philo, and Josephus, but from many Rabbinic passages. 'The merits of the Fathers,' is one of the commonest phrases in the mouth of the Rabbis. 95 Abraham was represented as sitting at the gate of Gehenna, to deliver any Israelite 96 who otherwise might have been consigned to its terrors. 97 In fact, by their descent from Abraham, all the children of Israel were nobles, 98 infinitely higher than any proselytes. 'What,' exclaims the Talmud, 'shall the born Israelite stand upon the earth, and the proselyte be in heaven?' 99 In fact, the ships on the sea were preserved through the merit of Abraham; the rain descended on account of it. 100 For his sake alone had Moses been allowed to ascend into heaven, and to receive the Law; for his sake the sin of the golden calf had been forgiven; 101 his righteousness had on many occasions been the support of Israel's cause; 102 Daniel had been heard for the sake of Abraham; 103 nay, his merit availed even for the wicked. 104 105 In its extravagance the Midrash thus apostrophises Abraham: 'If thy children were even (morally) dead bodies, without blood vessels or bones, thy merit would avail for them!' 106

But if such had been the inner thoughts of his bearers, John warned them, that God was able of those stones that strewed the river-bank to raise up children unto Abraham; 107 108 or, reverting to his former illustration of 'fruits meet for repentance,' that the proclamation of the Kingdom was, at the same time, the laying of the axe to the root of every tree that bore not fruit. Then making application of it, in answer to the specific inquiry of various classes, the preacher gave them such practical advice as applied to the well-known sins of their past; 109 yet in this also not going beyond the

merely negative, or preparatory element of 'repentance.' The positive, and all-important aspect of it, was to be presented by the Christ. It was only natural that the hearers wondered whether John himself was the Christ, since he thus urged repentance. For this was so closely connected in their thoughts with the Advent of the Messiah, that it was said, 'If Israel repented but one day, the Son of David would immediately come.' 110 But here John pointed them to the difference between himself and his work, and the Person and Mission of the Christ. In deepest reverence he declared himself not worthy to do Him the service of a slave or of a disciple. 111 His Baptism would not be of preparatory repentance and with water, but the Divine Baptism in 112 the Holy Spirit and fire 113 - in the Spirit Who sanctified, and the Divine Light which purified, 114 and so effectively qualified for the 'Kingdom.' And there was still another contrast. John's was but preparing work, the Christ's that of final decision; after it came the harvest. His was the harvest, and His the garner; His also the fan, with which He would sift the wheat from the straw and chaff - the one to be garnered, the other burned with fire unextinguished and inextinguishable. 115 Thus early in the history of the Kingdom of God was it indicated, that alike that which would prove useless straw and the good corn were inseparably connected in God's harvest-field till the reaping time; that both belonged to Him; and that the final separation would only come at the last, and by His own Hand.

What John preached, that he also symbolised by a rite which, though not in itself, yet in its application, was wholly new. Hitherto the Law had it, that those who had contracted Levitical defilement were to immerse before offering sacrifice. Again, it was prescribed that such Gentiles as became 'proselytes of righteousness,' or 'proselytes of the Covenant' (*Gerey hatstsedeq* or *Gerey habberith*), were to be

admitted to full participation in the privileges of Israel by the threefold rites of circumcision, baptism, 116

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