

BOOK FOUR**PSALM 90-106****PSALM NINETY**

A prayer of Moses the man of God.

- 1 Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.*
- 2 Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*
- 3 You turn men back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men."*
- 4 For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.*
- 5 You sweep men away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning--*
- 6 though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered.*
- 7 We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation.*
- 8 You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.*
- 9 All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan.*
- 10 The length of our days is seventy years-- or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.*
- 11 Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you.*
- 12 Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*
- 13 Relent, O LORD! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants.*
- 14 Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.*
- 15 Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble.*
- 16 May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children.*
- 17 May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us-- yes, establish the work of our hands.*

The fourth of the Book of Psalms is the shortest in the series: only 17. The First Book contains 41, the second 31, the third 18 and the fifth 43.

There is no reason to analyze the subscript of this psalm (A Prayer of Moses the Man of God) into obliteration, as some commentators endeavor to do. Why would Moses not be the author of this majestic poem?

This New Year's Eve psalm is a strange composition. The main theme consists of contrasts: the brevity and transience of man's life stands in opposition to God's eternity, separation stands over against return, and joy faces oppression.

The first word of the psalm is Lord, *'Adonay* in Hebrew. The second word is *ma'own* which *Strongs Definitions* defines as "an abode, of God (the Tabernacle or the Temple), men (their home) or animals (their lair); hence, a retreat (asylum)." *The Adam Clarke Commentary* writes about this: "[Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place] Maa'own...; but instead of this several MSS. have ma'owz..., 'place of defense,' or 'refuge,' which is the reading of the Vulgate, Septuagint, Arabic, and Anglo-Saxon. Ever since thy covenant with Abraham thou hast been the Resting-place, Refuge, and Defense of thy people Israel."

Most English versions read *ma'own* and translate it with "dwelling place." TLB uses the term "home." A footnote in the RSV states that "refuge" is another reading. Both readings emphasize the fact that we live in a hostile world and that fellowship with God is the only option that gives satisfaction to man. Moses says that, in every generation, there have been people who fled to God and who have known fellowship with Him. When we are converted to the Lord and we seek and find Him, we do nothing new in world history. Throughout the ages, people who have understood that they could not face life by themselves have done the same thing.

The context suggests that we have to flee towards God. The mention of the creation of the mountains and of the earth on which we live makes us realize that our origin also is in God. We belong to Him. This makes it a natural thing for us to dwell with Him and to flee to Him when the earth becomes too cold, too dark, and too frightening for us.

Dwelling with God brings us back to the conditions before the fall, to the eternity in which God laid the foundation for our salvation, to the time when our names were "written in the book of life

belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.”¹ It becomes evident that God the creator and God the savior are one and the same person. The birth of the mountains and our salvation and rehabilitation are inseparably linked together in Him.

A furtive glance at vs. 3 would make us think that God had created us for the purpose of returning to dust, but the opposite proves to be true. The contrast between God’s eternity and our transience was not part of God’s original plan. We were created for eternity. Our returning to dust is an interruption of the plan as is clear from vs. 13: “Relent, O LORD! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants.”

Initially, the psalmist does not give us any reason as to why man returns to dust. Adam’s fall in sin is never mentioned. We also do not read that it is only the body that returns to dust. The hope of the resurrection is not completely absent from this psalm, but it is not specifically spelled out either. It sounds as if God alone bears full responsibility for man’s mortality. We could say that Moses supposed the first three chapters of Genesis to be so well known that there was no need for further explanation. The important point is not the cause but the effect. Sin has made man into an ephemera. Even if we would all live to be a thousand years old, we would have nothing to boast of before God. What God said to Adam is true of all of us: “Dust you are and to dust you will return.”² Yet, it would be wrong to emphasize this fact one-sidedly, as if God had taken the initiative for the death of man. In his *Commentary on the Psalms*, George Knight makes the interesting observation that the Hebrew word used for “man” is not Adam but Enosh. The sentence reads literally: “You turn Enosh to destruction and say ‘Return, children of Adam.’” Enosh is not the man God created. He made Adam in His image and likeness.³ Enosh is the man who broke off the fellowship with God and who rebelled against Him.

Our return to dust is not the result of the fact that God is eternal, although a superficial reading of the text may give us that impression. God created man for eternity and, in the words of the Apostle John: “The man who does the will of God lives forever.”⁴ The contrast between our transience and God’s eternity is the result of sin.

Peter uses the phrase “a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day” in quite a different context, as a proof of God’s compassion. God shortens and lengthens the time because of His love for man who is lost. We read: “But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”⁵

Seen in the light of this psalm, it seems as if the stress upon God’s eternity is a disadvantage for man. But we have to keep on reminding ourselves that it is sin that sweeps man away and makes him wither, not the fact that God’s character is eternal.

In the second part of this psalm, in the verses 8-13, the psalm exposes the truth more clearly by mentioning our iniquities and secret sins. Our mortality places us in opposition to God’s eternity, and our iniquity makes us the object of God’s wrath. Our concept of God’s wrath is often quite distorted, as is our notion about God’s other attributes. Much of what we call wrath and anger is nothing more than the reaction of evil man to the goodness of God. We treat God’s anger over our wickedness, cruelty, and meanness as if it were malice. This is the reason in Revelation there is mention of “the wrath of the Lamb.”⁶ It is a type of oxymoron to attribute wrath to a lamb! The Seven Bowls of Wrath are, in a final analysis, nothing else but what man poured out upon himself when he separated himself from God. This does not mean that the wrath of God wouldn’t be an objective reality, but unless we understand that God’s wrath cannot be separated from His goodness and His love, we do not understand who God is. We might as well call the scalpel of the surgeon an instrument of evil. God’s wrath is intended for our salvation. Without the wrath of God we would never know how horrible sin is.

Much of the potency of the venom of sin depends on its anonymity. God’s wrath brings to light what man does in the dark. This implies confession, because judgment ultimately consists in our finding ourselves guilty when we see ourselves, as bearers of God’s image, placed next to the original. The classic example is that of Isaiah’s cry: “Woe to me!... I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live

¹ See Rev. 13:8; 17:8; Eph. 1:4

² Gen. 3:19

³ See Gen. 1:26,27

⁴ I John 2:17

⁵ II Pet. 3:8,9

⁶ Rev. 6:16

among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”⁷ We may say that God’s wrath has a salutary effect upon us. The Holy Spirit uses it to bring us to self-examination and confession. When we confess our guilt before God He will hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.⁸

Another positive effect of God’s wrath is that we learn to evaluate our life and ourselves correctly. Not only does time fly and we fly away with it but we also recognize that the contents of our lives have no lasting value. “The length of our days is seventy years-- or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow.” The NKJ reads: “their boast is only labor and sorrow.”

The second part of this psalm, verses 7-12, fits perfectly in the forty-year period of the desert journey when Israel lived literally under the wrath of God, and when they knew that the whole generation that had set out from Egypt would not live to see the end of the journey. This is a good reason for me to believe that Moses is the author of this psalm. It would have been quite an achievement to reach the age of seventy or eighty under those circumstances.

From a medical viewpoint, aging is a mystery. There is no explanation of the fact that, at a certain moment, the demolition process of the body sets in. Why did man live so much longer before the flood? The oxygen content of the atmosphere may have been a factor. According to the Bible, the actual reason is spiritual. The limitation of man’s life span is an act of divine grace. Thus God limits the time it takes for the cancer of sin to do its destructive work in us.

On the other hand, the forty-year wandering through the desert was a result of a lack of faith. The conquest of Canaan lay before the people but they refused it out of unbelief. In the words of the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews: “So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.”⁹

Seen in the light of the theme of this psalm, our entering into the rest of God in Jesus Christ puts us in quite a different position. Jesus says: “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”¹⁰ For us, God’s wrath is past in Jesus Christ, and it makes little difference for us whether we live to be 70 or 80 years of age, because we have crossed already from death into life. Yet this psalm has its importance for us because we forget easily. Faith is not a constant factor in our lives and gaining a heart of wisdom will benefit us all. We all have to learn to count, as Moses says: “Teach us to number our days aright.” We cannot count down because we don’t know how long our lives will be on earth, but we can add. We could give as title for this psalm the phrase “The Wisdom of the Right Arithmetic.” Adding would not make us gain a heart of wisdom if death were the end of life. Without hope there would only be despair, not wisdom. Wisdom consists in the reminder of what is to come. A wise man knows he will be held responsible for his acts. Either we give account of our life, or Jesus Christ does it for us. The highest wisdom is the wisdom Christ has become for us. Paul says: “It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-- that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.”¹¹ This presupposes that our being in Christ is a daily experience for us.

Moses does not speak about dying only but rather about the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. “Relent, O LORD! How long will it be?” says the same as: “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”¹²

The morning in vs. 14 is the first day of the new creation, which began at the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Israel’s entering the Promised Land was a vague shadow of this event. The joy and gladness Moses longed for is ours in the reality of Christ.

We can say about the words of Moses what Peter said about all the prophets of the Old Testament: “Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.”¹³ The writer to the Hebrews adds to this: “These were all

⁷ Isa. 6:5

⁸ See Micah 7:19

⁹ Heb. 3:19

¹⁰ John 5:24

¹¹ I Cor. 1:30

¹² See Rev. 22:20

¹³ I Pet. 1:10-12

commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”¹⁴

Now we can say about Moses what Christ said about Abraham: “Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.”¹⁵

The weight of the glory that awaits us surpasses the hardships of our few years on earth so enormously that we can hardly speak of a comparison. That is why Paul says: “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”¹⁶ That is wisdom. We ought not neglect to take this in account when we number our days aright.

Escaping God’s wrath, therefore, results in a life that brings forth lasting fruit to the glory of God. In John’s Gospel, Jesus says that an intimate fellowship with Him in love and obedience will produce much fruit to the glory of God.¹⁷ Moses says: “May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children.” God’s deeds, His unending love (His *chesed*), and His splendor are all mentioned in the same breath as parallels, matters related to one another. God’s power, glory, and loving-kindness are indeed one. The image of the intimate relationship between the vine and the branch clarifies this also.

It is God’s intention that our children also share in this blessing. It is true that faith in God is not hereditary. But when our children observe in us a life of intimacy with God, it may kindle in them a desire for a similar relationship.

If God establishes the work of our hands, it means that it will have value for eternity. Jesus speaks about deeds that are wrought in God,¹⁸ which means the same thing.

The psalm opens with God’s eternity and it closes with ours. The Apostle John says: “The man who does the will of God lives forever.”¹⁹ The psalm opens with God’s majesty and closes with His favor or beauty. The Hebrew word translated “favor” is *no`am*, which means “agreeableness, beauty.” God is a refuge and a stronghold, but also a source of warmth and tenderness.

¹⁴ Heb. 11:39-40

¹⁵ John 8:56

¹⁶ Rom. 8:18

¹⁷ See John 15:1-8

¹⁸ See John 3:21(KJV)

¹⁹ I John 2:17

PSALM NINETY-ONE

- 1 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.**
2 I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."
3 Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence.
4 He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.
5 You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day,
6 nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.
7 A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.
8 You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.
9 If you make the Most High your dwelling-- even the LORD, who is my refuge--
10 then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent.
11 For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;
12 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.
13 You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.
14 "Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.
15 He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.
16 With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation."

This beautiful psalm has no title. In the background, we see all kinds of dangers lurking that can bring about man's undoing. Man lives in enemy territory, and the prince of this world is the murderer of men from the beginning. A person who has no protection is doomed. We all need protection, but protection is not provided automatically. We have to ask for it and place ourselves under it.

To place oneself under the protection of God is like entering into a marriage relationship. It presupposes the giving up of one's independence and it involves an act of surrender. Without these conditions, the majestic opening words of this psalm will be nothing but empty phrases for us.

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty." He who enters into a marriage relationship with God, sleeps in His arms. Protection cannot be separated from love, intimacy, and fidelity, such as are the marks of a good marriage.

Our marriage partner is *Elyown Shadai*, the Most High, the Almighty. The devil may be great and strong, but he is not the Most High and the Almighty. Our enemy is no match for the attributes of our Beloved. This thought establishes a connection between this psalm and The Song of Solomon. There is also a relationship between this psalm and the preceding one. In Psalm 90, God is a refuge, a hiding place to which man can flee and recognize his sinfulness and his transient condition. In this psalm, the emphasis is on victory and rehabilitation.

The name *Elyown* not only indicates God's rank but also His character. Not only is there no one who is more powerful or wiser than God, but God is unparalleled in all His qualifications. God possesses all His attributes (His love, faithfulness, grace, goodness, compassion, righteousness) in an infinite and perfect measure. This is also expressed in God's holiness, which is the sum of His eternal perfections. It is to this God that we flee and by whose omnipotence we are protected.

In Him we put our trust. It is, after all, a matter of faith. We live in a world in which the temporal things are visible to us and the eternal ones are invisible. The power of the Evil One surrounds us daily and heaven is far away. Without faith we lose perspective. Faith is focused on God. Faith always needs a focal point. Faith without a point of reference is worthless. It is nonsense to speak about faith as if the only importance would be that it makes us feel good about certain matters. Faith is the anchor of the soul, but an anchor that is not fixed into solid matter gives no help. Unless our faith is fixed upon *Elyown Shadai*, it is of no use. The anchor cable has to be attached both to the anchor and to the solid ground.

In the second stanza, the emphasis is not upon our experience but upon God: "He is..." "He will..." The fowler's snare and the pestilence are parallel images. Both speak of a conspiracy, an effort to trap man. *The Tyndale Commentary* believes that the word translated with "pestilence" could be vocalized differently, which would give it the meaning of "a deadly word" or slander. Slander is, of course, of human origin. But behind every human conspiracy lurks a demon. The devil has set traps for people since Paradise

where he tricked the first man. In Jude's Epistle we read: "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy...."²⁰ This is the important thing: God is in the process of "bringing many sons to glory,"²¹ to borrow the words of Hebrews, and He wants to protect us against the dangers that surround us while we are on the way. He is both our goal and our refuge while we are on the way. He is not only our refuge but also our goal. Although this psalm mainly deals with what happens on the road, we should not lose sight of the fact that being on the way is not a goal in itself.

Jesus used the image of the bird that protects its little ones under her wings when He wept over the city of Jerusalem. Luke tells us: "As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it."²² And Matthew records the words He spoke: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."²³ From Jesus' deep emotion, we learn that God is infinitely more inclined to protect us than we are ready to be protected. A little chick will hide under its mother's wing when danger threatens. In this man differs from the animal. Our problem is not that there is no salvation, no protection, or no refuge, but that we are not interested in being saved or protected. That is why the words: "I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust,' " are such a breakthrough.

The fowler is out to kill us. Nothing gives a better picture of the liberty God wants man to enjoy than a flying bird. Every one who gives place to the devil in his life becomes trapped. A bird that flies into a fowler's trap is caught by his own naiveté, mistaking the bait for food. A person who recognizes the devil's bait for what it is will not easily be caught and lose his God-given liberty. Bait degrades a bird, as sin disgraces a person. God wants to protect us from losing our human dignity.

The slander, which is depicted by the image of the pestilence, has the same meaning. Our value consists of the fact that we bear the image of God. When this image is damaged, we perish. The devil wants to trap us because he hates us; God wants to protect us because He loves us.

The resting in the shadow of the Almighty, the embrace of love, speak of maturity and an adult relationship in our fellowship with God. His covering us with His feathers means that He protects the child in us.

"His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart." The Apostle John mentions God's faithfulness in connection with the forgiveness of our sins and the cleansing of our life. We read in his First Epistle: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."²⁴ God's pardon makes us immune to the attacks of the Evil One; his arrows will bounce off on God Himself.

The immediate result of God's protection will be victory over fear. "You will not fear the terror of night..." Fear was the first result of sin's entering into this world. When Adam sinned, he said to God: "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid..."²⁵ The breaking off of fellowship with God results in fear. The Apostle John shows that fear is related to a lack of love. We read: "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."²⁶ Victory over fear, therefore, is a matter of love and love is perfected in fellowship with God.

The Tyndale Commentary states that the LXX and the Midrash interpret the personification in the verses 5 and 6 as demons. Spurgeon takes them to be sicknesses. In his commentary on the psalms, *The Treasury of David*, he quotes an anonymous German doctor who described this psalm as "the best preservative in times of cholera, and in truth it is a heavenly medicine against plague and pest." On the other hand, Spurgeon freely spiritualizes the pictures. One of the problems, if we take the pestilence as a literal sickness, is that it is not true that Christians do not succumb to sicknesses. One cannot say that anybody who dies as a result of a contagious disease dies because of his lack of faith in God. It is not only the ungodly who die of malaria. For this reason I believe that we should see the pestilence and plague in this psalm as pictures of demonic powers who are after man's life. In spiritualizing the images, Spurgeon speaks about the temptations of riches and false doctrines. The problem in this is that most people are not

²⁰ Jude vs. 24

²¹ See Heb. 2:10

²² Luke 19:41

²³ Matt. 23:37

²⁴ I John 1:9

²⁵ Gen. 3:10

²⁶ I John 4:18

afraid of those menaces. One of the results of the influence of naturalism upon the thinking of man in the western world is that the realization of the reality of demonic influences upon our daily life is practically gone. Most Christians even have very little notion that the resistance we encounter in our everyday life comes from the side of the powers of darkness. Yet, this is the dividing issue between the righteous and the unrighteous. When the Almighty protects us, we are immune to the attacks of the devil. The damage he can inflict upon us is negligible in comparison with the inheritance that awaits us. But the unrighteous are like a plaything in the hands of the enemy. The damage the devil can wreak in the lives of God's children can, seemingly, be very heavy. Job's experience is an example. Jesus tells us that our bodies are not always safe against those attacks either. The admonition: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul"²⁷ implies that we can lose our lives. The important point is that, spiritually, we will suffer no damage. God is our refuge. This is what the psalmist says at the beginning of this psalm, in the middle, and at the end of the second stanza (verses 2,4,9).

It is interesting to note who is speaking in this psalm. It is clear when the psalmist himself speaks, as in the verses 2 and 9^a, and also when God speaks, as in the verses 14-16. But who is this third person who is speaking in the other verses? It can be either the testimony of other people or the voice of the Holy Spirit. Satan quoted the verses 11 and 12 during Jesus' temptation in the desert: "he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."²⁸ (He did not cite vs. 13: "You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent!!") This fact does, of course, not make Satan the author of this psalm. It is possible that, in some of the verse, the author speaks to himself. This would explain the abrupt transition from the third to the first person, as in vs. 9 and 10: "If you make the Most High your dwelling-- even the LORD, who is my refuge-- then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent."

In those verses, God is again called *Elyown*. "If you make the Most High your dwelling" speaks of an act of faith, of an initiative taken by man. God does not protect us against our will. Nor is our role in this a merely passive one. We are actively involved in this act of being protected. A bride gives herself willingly and consciously into marriage, she does not merely let herself be married. In the same way, we establish our position in God. The result of such an act of surrender is absolute and overwhelming. There are no accidents, we stumble no longer, and victory over the enemy is guaranteed. In passing, the ministry of angels, twenty-four hours a day, is mentioned.

We have to consider what is implied in this actively making the Most High our dwelling. The Apostle Paul gives the best commentary on this in his treatise about the spiritual armor. We read: "Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."²⁹ We are responsible for putting on the armor. It is up to us to practice truth, righteousness, readiness, and faith, to think clearly and to pray. Putting on the helmet of salvation means that we think in terms of salvation. Our brain needs to be protected. The thrust of Ephesians chapter 6 is not that we have to win certain battles but that we stand in the victory Jesus has won for us and that we maintain our position. This is all implied in the fact that we make the Most High our dwelling and our refuge. It is about His truth and righteousness, not about ours.

Our Lord Jesus Christ sets the matter of protection by angels straight when He answered the suggestion by the devil with a quote from Deuteronomy: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."³⁰ By the way, the devil knew quite well what he said when he quoted from this psalm. He understood that the angels had to protect man against the devil. If he had succeeded in tempting Jesus to deplete this promise of its strength through unbelief, he would indeed have gained a major victory. God guarantees angel protection to us. David says: "The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them."³¹ How

²⁷ Matt. 10:28

²⁸ See Matt. 4:6

²⁹ Eph. 6:13-18

³⁰ Deut. 6:6; Matt. 4:7

³¹ Ps. 34:7

this must enrage the enemy that, although we are weak human beings, he cannot even come close enough to us to inflict lasting harm upon us! If, however, we withdraw from God's protection, we are defenseless. If God is our refuge, we "will tread upon the lion and the cobra; [we] will trample the great lion and the serpent." Paul says in Romans: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet."³²

In the last verses of this psalm (verses 14-16), it is God who speaks. It is clear from these verses that the psalm deals primarily with the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the person who is addressed in this psalm. We can only claim the promises and blessings of this psalm in as much as we are "in Him." This fact makes the devil's quote the more interesting!

Nobody has ever been loved by the Father as the Son, and no one ever loved the Father more than Jesus did. No one ever acknowledged the Father's Name like Christ.³³ The protection, salvation, and victory we experience is what the Father granted to His Son. For this reason, this psalm is written for one person only, with the exception of the first verse: "He who..." applies to whoever.

This doesn't mean that we could not love God. The great commandment reads: "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."³⁴ It is only possible for us to love God in this way if we realize that He loved us first, and this realization is only possible if we are "in Jesus Christ." It is also only possible to know the Name and the character of the Father in Christ. In Jesus Christ are redemption, protection, answer to prayer, experience of God's presence, and rehabilitation. There are also long life, eternal life and the showing of God's salvation. For this reason we can safely say that whoever does not make God his refuge is a fool.

³² Rom. 16:20

³³ See Matt. 3:17; John 10:17; 17:6

³⁴ Deut. 6:5

PSALM NINETY-TWO

A psalm. A song. For the Sabbath day.

- 1 It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, O Most High,**
- 2 to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night,**
- 3 to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp.**
- 4 For you make me glad by your deeds, O LORD; I sing for joy at the works of your hands.**
- 5 How great are your works, O LORD, how profound your thoughts!**
- 6 The senseless man does not know, fools do not understand,**
- 7 that though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish, they will be forever destroyed.**
- 8 But you, O LORD, are exalted forever.**
- 9 For surely your enemies, O LORD, surely your enemies will perish; all evildoers will be scattered.**
- 10 You have exalted my horn like that of a wild ox; fine oils have been poured upon me.**
- 11 My eyes have seen the defeat of my adversaries; my ears have heard the rout of my wicked foes.**
- 12 The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon;**
- 13 planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God.**
- 14 They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green,**
- 15 proclaiming, "The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him."**

This psalm is the only one in the book that was especially written for the Sabbath day. The name of the author is not mentioned.

The Sabbath is the only feast that originates from the time before man's fall into sin, but in the celebration of the day in Israel, sin imprinted its mark upon it. From a day of rest and celebration, the Sabbath became a day on which man was forbidden to work on threat of death. The Sabbath was broken by sin. For this reason Jesus said on the Sabbath: "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."³⁵ Jesus Himself broke the Sabbath, and in doing so He made the Sabbath for us a symbol of redemption from sin, a day of resurrection from the dead. It is true that Sunday, the day we celebrate, is not technically the Sabbath, but in Christian practice the Sunday has replaced it, at least partly.

In the first stanza, the author speaks about God's acts in general terms. The second strophe deals particularly with redemption, and the third with rehabilitation. In the light of the Old Testament, those are strange themes for a Sabbath celebration. Originally, the Sabbath was a day of rest to celebrate the completion of creation. We could see in "the morning," and "at night" a reference to the theme of creation: "And there was evening, and there was morning."³⁶ Praise to God is the essence of the Sabbath. God made the Sabbath as a crowning day of creation: "And God saw that it was good."³⁷ This is the basis of our acknowledgment that the God who created everything is good and that we have to praise and glorify Him. Praise is good in the absolute sense of the word; it is even good for ourselves. We prosper as we praise God.

God is called YHWH in this psalm and also *Elyown*, the Most High. The psalmist suggests that we begin our praise the moment we wake up! The night with its rest and quiet intimate to us the faithfulness of God. This does not speak of some dreamlike meditation but of the experience of hours of insomnia. The music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp are not only heard during the day. Johann Sebastian Bach composed a theme and variations for the count Goldberg, which his secretary had to play for him during the night when his highness couldn't sleep. The psalmist probably speaks about a similar composition here.

The reason for praise is the fact that God created us. It is an existentialist experience of life in its highest form, a celebration of "to be." The fact that we live and we know it is enough to sing for joy to our God, our creator. That is the essence of the Sabbath.

The playing of the lyre and the harp places the praise in the domain of the fine arts. We ought to praise God with our gifts and abilities. The four cherubim who encircle the throne are our model in this; they worship God without ceasing day and night. These creatures are covered with eyes, according to the

³⁵ John 5:17

³⁶ Gen. 1:5 ff.

³⁷ Gen. 1:10

description the Apostle John gives of them.³⁸ This allows them to have a multidimensional super consciousness. Their awareness of reality is infinitely higher than ours, which allows them to praise God in this perfect manner. God does not expect us to praise Him instinctively like the bird that sings, but to worship Him consciously because we are human beings with gifts and abilities He gave us. Man has the ability to observe God's acts, to analyze them, and to conclude that the whole of creation is one perfect masterpiece. This conclusion is a cause for rejoicing in the creator of the universe. Joy itself is a gift of God. Our joy should not depend upon our circumstances, but nobody can deny that there is a connection between joy and circumstances. The link is in the acknowledgment of the glory of the creator and this glory in creation.

The second stanza emphasizes a completely different aspect of the Sabbath. At this point "the senseless man" is introduced. The KJV calls him "a brutish man." Synonyms used for these people are: "wicked," "fools," "evil doers," and "enemies." The entrance of sin into this world has drastically changed the character of the Sabbath. It is no longer possible to enjoy God's creation without any inhibition. All of creation is now laced with evil. There are miscarriages and sickness, cruelty and plagues in nature. None of this can be explained from the viewpoint of God's goodness. The atheist exploits this condition to argue against the existence of the God of the Bible. For this reason the psalmist uses words like "senseless" and "fools." God, obviously, expects us to be able to discern between what He created as perfect in His goodness and that which was introduced later by the devil. If we are unable to draw this line, God considers us senseless and foolish. The result is that we become His enemies and evildoers. The purpose of the Sabbath is to correct our view of creation. Our vision changes as we put ourselves on the Lord's side.

The author of this psalm introduces himself in vs. 10 as an anointed one. We read that he says: "Fine oils have been poured upon me." This anointing is new and unique. The one who speaks here is the anointed one, the Christ. Undoubtedly, it is Christ who has been speaking in this entire psalm. We see in the New Testament how Jesus' attitude toward the Sabbath differed drastically from that of His contemporaries. Jesus saw in the Sabbath the culmination of the work of redemption and rehabilitation for which the Father had sent Him into the world. On the Sabbath, He performed the works the Father demonstrated to Him. To the Jews of His time, He said: "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working. I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."³⁹ It is this work of salvation about which Jesus preached in such a grandiose manner in John's Gospel, that the psalmist says here: "How great are your works, O LORD, how profound your thoughts!" This psalm does not only speak about the miracle of the creation in which we live, but about the new creation with its redemption, healing, and resurrection of the dead. It is about this creation the Apostle Paul writes: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."⁴⁰ In this psalm, the psalmist expresses the same thought with the words of vs. 5 – "How great are your works, O LORD, how profound your thoughts!"

The Sabbath is also the day of victory over the enemy. The devil intended to destroy the creation that God had made for His own enjoyment. In this he had partial success but, at the same time, his efforts led to his own ruin. The death of the Lord's Anointed One also meant the elimination of the enemy.

God's anointing is compared to the horns of a wild ox, the strength of a bull. In a way, this is a strange comparison. Usually the horns of a bull represent brutish force and the power that emanates from the anointing of the Holy Spirit is the complete opposite of any power we know on earth. In Zechariah's vision, the angel of the Lord says: " 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty."⁴¹ The power of the Holy Spirit is incomparably greater than the might of men and demons. Almost mockingly, Jesus looked at the threats of Satan and He said: "the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me."⁴² For the man who is in Jesus Christ all the threats of the Evil One and all his roaring have no meaning.

The third stanza (verses 12-15) highlights the third aspect of the Sabbath as the entering into the rest of God. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks about this aspect of the Sabbath when he says:

³⁸ See Rev. 4:6,8

³⁹ John 5:17,19

⁴⁰ I Cor. 2:9

⁴¹ Zech. 4:6

⁴² John 14:30

“Anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.”⁴³ As in some of the other psalms, the righteous is contrasted here with the wicked. God mocks the wicked and his plots. As in the first psalm, the righteous is represented here under the image of a tree. But here we get the impression that the psalmist mixes his metaphors. Palm trees and cedars are not similar, and it is difficult to imagine a tree planted in a house. Yet, the image suggests greatness, like the beauty of a large piece of real estate surrounded by giants of the forest which increase the majesty of the property. The righteous are factors that enlarge the glory of the house of the Lord. On the other hand, the presence of the Lord is the essence of our glory. The place where the trees are planted suggest fellowship with God. The images describe what happens to a man who knows fellowship with God; there is life and growth. The words “flourish” and “grow” speak of the vitality of the fellowship. Growth also implies progress. Our relationship with God is never static; there is an increase of love and intimacy. Fruit bearing is also mentioned. Psalm One says that the righteous will “yield its fruit in season.”⁴⁴ This psalm promises that the fruit bearing will not cease with the increase of the years. This symbolized eternity. There will be no “going to seed.” Entering into the rest of God assures the eternal freshness of our life. These verses do not give us any assurance that our bodies will not deteriorate. Paul says: “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”⁴⁵ In our daily walk with God we demonstrate His truth and righteousness. “The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.”

⁴³ Heb. 4:10

⁴⁴ See Ps. 1:3

⁴⁵ II Cor. 4:16

PSALM NINETY-THREE

1 The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed in majesty and is armed with strength. The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved.

2 Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity.

3 The seas have lifted up, O LORD, the seas have lifted up their voice; the seas have lifted up their pounding waves.

4 Mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea-- the LORD on high is mighty.

5 Your statutes stand firm; holiness adorns your house for endless days, O LORD.

The LORD reigns. YHWH is king. This psalm sings about God's omnipotence. The NIV renders vs. 5 with: "Your statutes stand firm." The NKJ, with several other versions, reads: "Your testimonies are very sure." The Hebrew word is *`edah* which is defined by *Strongs Definitions* with "testimony." There is a relationship between God's reign and His testimony and our testimony about Him. Jesus also connects the mandate He received with our testimony of Him when He says: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."⁴⁶ The Lord is sovereign in this rebellious world.

Biblical scholars have endeavored to link certain psalms with cultic events in Israel which, they believe, were akin to similar cultic observances among other surrounding nations. These cultic events are not necessarily identical with the festivals of the Bible. In some of the psalms the scholars would discover similarities with observances of other ancient peoples. From *The Tyndale Commentary* we quote: "... Scholars have discerned different festivals as the major sources of the psalms. Mowinkel... saw the feast of Ingathering and Tabernacles, at the turn of the year, as the chief of these, celebrating God's epiphany and enthronement with a ritual so elaborate that it gave rise to more than forty psalms. Here the drama of creation was enacted, with a ritual battle against the sea and its monsters (*cf., e.g.,* Ps. 89:9f.), like the battles in Canaanite and Babylonian myths. In due course Yahweh, His presence symbolized by the ark, would ascend Mount Zion in procession, there to be challenged, admitted (24:7ff.) and finally acclaimed with the cry, 'The Lord has become king!' (*e.g.* 93:1); in other words He would set events on their right course and assign to the nations their destinies." The commentary correctly observes that those theories are more founded on the anthropology of the Middle East than on the text of the psalms.

The proclamation "The LORD reigns" is, in Hebrew *Yahweh maalak*. In the first place this is an eternal fact that is not dependent upon anything that happens on earth. However, the fact that the whole of creation has fallen in sin makes God's reign particularly relevant. There are certain moments in the history of the universe at which God reaffirms His kingly rule. This theme is repeated in the series of psalms that follows this one;⁴⁷ we also find it repeated in Revelation.⁴⁸ This theme is the essence of the Kingdom of Heaven.

This psalm does not deal with God's right to the throne but with His acceptance of the rule. God robes Himself in majesty which is the glory of His being. It would, of course, be impossible for God to discard or lose His glory and, at the same time, remain God. The Apostle Paul describes the Incarnation as: "[Christ] Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."⁴⁹ The Greek word translated here with "made himself nothing" is *ekénoosen*, from *kenoo*, meaning "to make empty." In becoming man, Jesus did not give up His divine nature but, temporarily, laid aside the use of His divine attributes, living on earth like a human being with all the limitation imposed upon that condition. After His resurrection, however, He said to His disciples: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."⁵⁰ It is this moment and declaration that is prophesied in this psalm. When Jesus rose from the dead, He robed Himself in majesty. Without the incarnation this would have been impossible. The eternal, perfect

⁴⁶ Matt. 28:18-20; see also Acts 1:8

⁴⁷ Psalms 93-101

⁴⁸ See Rev. 11:15,17,18; 12:10; 15:3,4; 17:14; 19:6

⁴⁹ Phil. 2:6,7

⁵⁰ Matt. 28:18

God cannot, literally, robe Himself in majesty. Nothing can be added to perfection. But the Lord who died on the cross, could rise from the dead and arm Himself with strength and majesty.

“The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved.” The result of Jesus’ taking up again His omnipotence means the restoration of a cosmic equilibrium. The Bible does not clearly explain what happened to creation at the fall of Lucifer. One theory is that the formless and chaotic condition of the earth at the beginning of the creation story in Genesis was the result of this fall. This is plausible but rather difficult to prove. It is, however, quite possible that “the world is firmly established” refers to the establishing of order after the fall of Satan. It is clear that our planet will not continue to exist throughout eternity. The old will be replaced by the new when there will be a new heaven and a new earth. In that sense the earth *will* be moved. The only item that is eternally secure in the whole universe is the throne of God. This throne is not a chair on which God is seated in the physical sense of the word but it is the emblem of God’s absolute power over all that is spiritual and material.

This fact establishes the meaning of the other verses in the psalm. It gives a spiritual connotation also to the seas and the waves which represent, not literal bodies of water, but human rebellion against God. David uses the same image elsewhere, when he uses the picture of the sea and the uproar of the nations as poetical parallels. We read for instance: “Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts.”⁵¹ The collective anger of all human beings is puny, small, and ridiculous in comparison with the majesty of God’s anger. The might of the Lord Yahweh in heaven is infinitely greater than all the power that all humans can produce together.

It is also possible, on the other hand, to interpret the image of the seas and the waves as an image of the wrath of God over sin, as was the case during the flood of Noah. Both interpretations are, in a way, identical. Man always perishes because of his own doing. He dies of his own medicine. God punishes man by allowing him to do as he wishes.

If, indeed, God’s robing Himself with majesty and power speaks of the rehabilitation of Jesus Christ in His resurrection, then His being enthroned refers to His present ministry as High Priest. This ministry is the theme of the Epistle to the Hebrews. But there are other aspects involved besides Jesus’ intercession for us, such as the subjection of God’s enemies. David says: “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’”⁵² This latter truth is probably more emphasized in this psalm in “the LORD on high is mighty.” This phrase also forms a bridge to the last verse of the psalm which speaks of God’s house on earth and God’s Word to man. Man is here the person whom God loves.

A closer look at this psalm reveals how condensed it is; the poem is written like a digest. God’s law is called “statutes,” which is the translation of the Hebrew *’edah*, as we saw above. The implication of this word is that the world in which we live is completely in the dark concerning the reality of the things of heaven. The things that are visible to us are not enough proof to know God. It is God’s speaking to us which makes us realize that there is a heaven in which God is mighty in majesty and power. God’s law reveals to us something of God’s eternal character. This Word is utterly reliable; God’s statutes stand firm. We may be sure of what we know about God. There is light in the darkness. God is in heaven but He reveals Himself on earth.

This revelation consists in His statutes or testimonies in His temple in the Old Testament and in His Word and Spirit in the New Testament. God reveals Himself to the church of Jesus Christ by His Word and through the Holy Spirit and to the world through the church in His holiness. The temple was richly adorned with gold. This psalm states that the actual adornment of the temple consisted in the holiness of God that was present in it. In a spiritual sense, the same is true of the church. Man possesses no holiness of himself. Holiness is a uniquely divine attribute. There is no holiness outside God. God makes us participate in His divine nature and, consequently, in His holiness.

Holiness is also the essence of the New Jerusalem that is coming down out of heaven.⁵³ The gold and precious stones used for the construction of the city bespeak holiness which is the essence of all that gives value and meaning to life. Holiness is identical to glory. God’s presence constituted the glory of the temple in Jerusalem. God’s holiness is also the glory of the new building which is the church.

⁵¹ Ps. 46:2,3,6

⁵² Ps. 110:1

⁵³ See Rev. 21:2

The words “For endless days,” or “forevermore” declare an eternal principle. The vocative at the end of the sentence, “O LORD,” suggests that practice is not always identical with principle. God’s house on earth has never been what it ought to be, because “The LORD reigns” has, as yet, never completely become a reality among men.

PSALM NINETY-FOUR

- 1 *O LORD, the God who avenges, O God who avenges, shine forth.*
- 2 *Rise up, O Judge of the earth; pay back to the proud what they deserve.*
- 3 *How long will the wicked, O LORD, how long will the wicked be jubilant?*
- 4 *They pour out arrogant words; all the evildoers are full of boasting.*
- 5 *They crush your people, O LORD; they oppress your inheritance.*
- 6 *They slay the widow and the alien; they murder the fatherless.*
- 7 *They say, "The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob pays no heed."*
- 8 *Take heed, you senseless ones among the people; you fools, when will you become wise?*
- 9 *Does he who implanted the ear not hear? Does he who formed the eye not see?*
- 10 *Does he who disciplines nations not punish? Does he who teaches man lack knowledge?*
- 11 *The LORD knows the thoughts of man; he knows that they are futile.*
- 12 *Blessed is the man you discipline, O LORD, the man you teach from your law;*
- 13 *you grant him relief from days of trouble, till a pit is dug for the wicked.*
- 14 *For the LORD will not reject his people; he will never forsake his inheritance.*
- 15 *Judgment will again be founded on righteousness, and all the upright in heart will follow it.*
- 16 *Who will rise up for me against the wicked? Who will take a stand for me against evildoers?*
- 17 *Unless the LORD had given me help, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death.*
- 18 *When I said, "My foot is slipping," your love, O LORD, supported me.*
- 19 *When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul.*
- 20 *Can a corrupt throne be allied with you-- one that brings on misery by its decrees?*
- 21 *They band together against the righteous and condemn the innocent to death.*
- 22 *But the LORD has become my fortress, and my God the rock in whom I take refuge.*
- 23 *He will repay them for their sins and destroy them for their wickedness; the LORD our God will destroy them.*

The Bible speaks in two other places about God's wrath. In the Song of Moses, we read: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay."⁵⁴ And the Apostle Paul quotes that verse in Romans: "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord."⁵⁵ In the opening verse of this psalm, God is literally addressed as "God of vengeance." (NIV – "the God who avenges," NKJ – "God, to whom vengeance belongs").

We are, usually, taught that it is wrong for man to take revenge. We tend to draw the wrong conclusion from this that revenge in itself is wrong. God is the "God of vengeance." It is wrong for man to revenge himself because this is God's prerogative.

A parallel problem is self-glory. There are things that belong exclusively to God. It is man's undoing if he takes that which belongs solely to God. God says emphatically: "I will not give my glory to another," and "I will not yield my glory to another."⁵⁶ Similarly, He does not allow man to take revenge upon a fellow human being. There are cases in which God delegates this right, as when He orders Israel to take vengeance upon Midian,⁵⁷ and also upon Amalek.⁵⁸ The conquest of Canaan, actually, falls under this category. Then there is the question of the avenger of blood, the nearest relative of a murdered man. In some cases, the avenger of blood had the right to kill the murderer.⁵⁹ But there is not one single instance in which revenge for reasons of personal injustice suffered was permitted. It was, in all instances, a matter of justice, which officially belonged to a court of justice.

God is called "God of vengeance" because He is the source and measure of all justice. Justice without punishment of sin would be a farce. God's vengeance is the exercise of His office as judge of the whole earth. His vengeance is one of the elements of His glory. This is implied in the words: "Shine forth."

The psalmist seems to say in the first stanza that God is actually too slow in the exercise of vengeance. Man has always shown signs of impatience. Impatience was one of the elements that

⁵⁴ Deut. 32:35

⁵⁵ Rom. 12:19

⁵⁶ Isa. 42:8; 48:11

⁵⁷ Num. 31:1-54

⁵⁸ Ex. 17:16

⁵⁹ Num. 35:19

constituted the first sin. Adam and Eve wanted to take a shortcut to becoming like God. The souls under the altar, which John saw in Revelation, were impatient also. We read: “When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, ‘How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?’”⁶⁰

Regrettably, there are thousands of examples in the history of mankind of people who suppressed, crushed, and murdered others. It is not clear which episode in the history of Israel the psalmist referred to. It could be the Babylonian captivity, or the reign of King Manasseh. There is in vs. 15 a suggestion that the topic is corruption on the inside; that the oppression of Israel comes from people within the nation itself. This would certainly be the case if the psalmist refers to the reign of King Manasseh. But we are running ahead of the sequence of this psalm.

The motives for repression of one human being by another is always a spiritual one: the attitude of one man toward another is always determined by his relationship with God, or by the lack of it. Our vision of God is decisive for our attitude in society. When man thinks God doesn’t know what he does, he doesn’t feel accountable for his actions. Dr. Mengele, the infamous “doctor of death” in the German concentration camp of Auschwitz did not believe in a day of judgment. He knows better now! A small, impotent God who is smaller than man makes for little, insignificant humans who can be extremely cruel and devious in their relationships, but those who serve the eternal, almighty Creator of heaven and earth, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, bear His image.

The same suggestion of inner rottenness can be found in vs. 8: “Take heed, you senseless ones among the people; you fools, when will you become wise?” The senseless ones are the ones who believe that God doesn’t see what they are doing and that they are free to do as they please. The arguments the psalmist brings against this kind of philosophy are sublime: “Does he who implanted the ear not hear? Does he who formed the eye not see?” How irrefutable! It would be nonsense to think that He who designed the eye and the ear would be blind and mute Himself. Would the creator of light be in the dark about anything? If our human abilities, like our aptitude for observation and the capability to draw logical conclusions from what is observed are not derived from God’s own being, where does it then originate? If God did not create our mind, what guarantee do we then have that our thinking and acting has any value? All this and more is implied in the verses 10 and 11: “Does he who disciplines nations not punish? Does he who teaches man lack knowledge? The LORD knows the thoughts of man; he knows that they are futile.” God is the source and measure of all ethics. He teaches the nations by giving to man an inborn ethical consciousness. The word “punish” which is used in connection with the verb “to discipline” implies that man does not live according to the light he possesses. Man is fallen in sin, even man who fears God. All thinking that is not directed toward God is idle thinking. Even for the redeemed person it takes an effort to, in Paul’s words: “Set [his] mind[s] on things above, not on earthly things.”⁶¹

Although there is a connection with what precedes, the psalmist begins a whole new line of thought in vs. 12. We all have an inborn tendency to stray away from God. Even if we have decided to follow Jesus, and to subject our will to His, there is always a pull to the side, an aberration from the path to follow. This is the reason God allows difficulties in our lives. The psalmist uses the Hebrew word *yacar*, translated in the NIV with “discipline” and defined in *Strongs Definitions* as “to chastise, literally (with blows) or figuratively (with words); hence, to instruct.” In this psalm, we are not told what form this chastising takes. It is sufficient to know that God is treating us as sons.⁶²

Chastisement implies healing. In this psalm, chastisement is used in a beatitude: “Blessed is the man you discipline, O LORD, the man you teach from your law.” This kind of thinking means a reversal of our value system. James follows the same line of thought when he writes: “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds...”⁶³ God’s chastisement keeps us from God’s wrath. When God chastises us it means that He thinks it worth the effort to discipline us. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrew explains the purpose of chastisement when he says: “Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.”⁶⁴ This is a marvelous thought.

⁶⁰ Rev. 6:9,10

⁶¹ Col. 3:2

⁶² See Heb. 12:7

⁶³ James 1:2

⁶⁴ Heb. 12:10

God's discipline cannot be separated from the study of His Word. God disciplines, or disciples, us in teaching us His law, which is an expression of His will and character. In a sense we discipline ourselves by constantly comparing ourselves with God's character. In comparing ourselves as bearers of the image of God with the original we become aware of our deviations. It is this realization and subsequent confession of sin that makes us realize who we are before God. This confession will lead us into the rest of fellowship with the Father. In the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "Anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his."⁶⁵

This rest will protect us in the day of trouble. This doesn't merely mean that we escape, but that we live in a condition of rest. We have made the transition from death into life. The "rat-race" of life will no longer influence us. This psalm has particular comfort for those who pass through periods of persecution and for those who will pass through the great tribulation at the end of times, during the rule of the Antichrist.

It is a terrible thing when a process of justice is used as a framework to commit injustice. The reigns of terror of Hitler and Stalin are two of the many examples of this practice. The exercise of human justice is related to the righteousness of God. If the fall had not occurred, there would be no need for courts of justice. But when sin entered the world, God delegated His righteousness to man. If, however, man who has to exercise justice does not see the relationship between the carrying out of justice on earth and the character of God from which justice is derived, the door is open to all kinds of injustice. Satan and his demons are very clever in the manipulation of the judicial system. In another psalm God addressed particularly the judges with the words: "You are 'gods.'"⁶⁶ Because the judges misused their divine mandate to apply justice that God reminded them of their mortality. In the words of Isaiah: "[God] looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress."⁶⁷ The devil uses the destruction of justice and the corruption of society to intimidate Christians with his deafening noises and threats. It is particularly under such circumstances that God allows His children to enjoy His peace and rest.

Man who commits injustice is bent on his own interest and survival, but he never reaches that goal. All advantages brought on by injustice is temporal; only God's justice is eternal. The wicked dig their own grave. Man's shortsightedness is his undoing. God guarantees the preservation of His own people, because He chose them to be the channels of His revelation. When the psalmist says: "For the LORD will not reject his people; he will never forsake his inheritance," he implies that they are partakers of His revelation and of His glory in this world. It is important that we do not lose the light that is within us, and we should never allow ourselves to be weighed down by our circumstances to the point that we lose our hope for the future. "Judgment will again be founded on righteousness, and all the upright in heart will follow it." Nothing that is inspired by the devil will last. We should be careful not to interpret our suffering wrongly, as Job did.

The verses 16-19 suggest a deep inner struggle. At the same time, the psalmist reveals a great sense of self-worth. As God's children we are not mere playthings of evil powers. As we are being despised and rejected, we have a right to rehabilitation. This is the reason the psalmist appeals to YHWH. The Lord takes on the responsibility for our defense and He opposes those who commit injustice against us thinking they can crush us. Our attackers find themselves facing, not a defenseless human being, but the Almighty Himself, who is our shield and defense.

Vs. 17 reads literally: "My soul had almost dwelt in silence." The NIV adds the words "of death" to silence, but this is not in the Hebrew text. The psalmist, probably, does not speak here of physical death but of the hopelessness of eternal separation from God. It is the silence of despairing as opposed to the relief of fellowship with God mentioned in vs. 13. The psalmist had gone through tremendous inner turmoil and he saw himself slip and fall. The great anxiety caused by conflicting thoughts and emotions, which he experienced, confused him. A person who lives in fellowship with God has also surrendered his intellect to God. The Apostle Paul describes this with the words: "We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."⁶⁸ As God's children we have to learn to be obedient in our thought-life. Some people call this intellectual suicide. Those who say that do not realize that, unless the Holy Spirit governs our thinking, we fall under the influence of the Evil One. There are no "free-thinkers" in this world. All the devil can offer is pseudo-intellectualism. It is the one who is disobedient in his thinking who commits intellectual suicide.

⁶⁵ Heb. 4:10

⁶⁶ Ps. 82:6

⁶⁷ Isa. 5:7

⁶⁸ II Cor. 10:5^b

The psalmist shows us the way by saying: "Your consolation brought joy to my soul." This thought runs parallel to the one in vs. 12 – "Blessed is the man you discipline, O LORD, the man you teach from your law." God's joy and consolation come to us as we occupy ourselves with the Word of God. Of course, none of this calls for "a one-track mind" as opposed to the "multitude of thoughts" of vs. 19. Speaking about the mind of God, David exclaims: "How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!"⁶⁹ If confusion of thought is prevalent, the solution lies in seeing God's pattern of thinking in our circumstances.

But these verses do not only deal with our thought-life; they involve man in his totality. The slipping of the foot speaks of our walk; it emphasizes the moral aspect of our actions. The effect of the Word of God upon our life is consolation and joy for the soul. Fellowship with God establishes the balance between the various components of our life, which determine our personality.

The pressures of life tend to bring about fatigue and sadness, but being occupied with the Word of God will bring relief and comfort. Isaiah says: "But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."⁷⁰ And the Apostle Paul calls God: "the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort who comforts us in all our troubles."⁷¹ Pouring over the Word of God will give us insight into His character and the experience of His presence. How then would corrupt men be able to harm us?

The question that has pursued men throughout the ages is how can a God who is love tolerate the presence of injustice in the world? The underlying thought of such a question is that God might not be as loving as He wants us to believe. It insinuates that there would be some kind of understanding between God and the devil, a contract with secret clauses. Vs. 20 sets us straight on this point with the question: "Can a corrupt throne be allied with you-- one that brings on misery by its decrees?" There is an eternal distance between God and injustice. God protects His children and He gives them insight into the mystery of evil. He is the "God of vengeance." This is the answer to the question: "How can a God who is love...?"

This psalm is applicable to every century. Every person who thinks that he shall never have to give account of his life will come to the point of crying out "[Mountains] fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"⁷² "The wrath of the Lamb" will be the undoing of every man who thinks he doesn't need God in his life. This is, at the same time, the eternal consolation of those who do count God into their lives. The other side of the coin of God's vengeance is His grace. The Apostle Peter gives us a new definition of grace. He says: "If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God." The Greek text says literally: "If when you do well and suffer for it you take it patiently, this is *grace* with God."⁷³

PSALM NINETY-FIVE

- 1** *Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.*
- 2** *Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.*
- 3** *For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods.*
- 4** *In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him.*
- 5** *The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.*
- 6** *Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;*
- 7** *for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if you hear his voice,*
- 8** *do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert,*
- 9** *where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did.*
- 10** *For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways."*
- 11** *So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest."*

⁶⁹ Ps. 139:17

⁷⁰ Isa. 40:31

⁷¹ See II Cor. 1:3,4

⁷² Rev. 6:16,17

⁷³ I Pet. 2:20

The partition of this untitled psalm is relatively simple, there are two stanzas:

1. vs. 1-5
2. vs. 6-11

Both parts commence with an exhortation for praise, and give the reason for it. Vs. 1 – “Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD, ... For the LORD is the great God,” vs. 6 – “Come, let us bow down in worship... for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture.”

In the first stanza the stress is upon God as creator of the earth on which we live, and in the second our relationship with God is emphasized as creature toward the creator, our savior, and our sanctifier. This almost sounds like the “Fourfold Gospel” which is the earmark of The Christian and Missionary Alliance. The last verses, from vs. 7^b through 11, are placed in the right perspective by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.⁷⁴ Without this perspective of Hebrews, it would be easy for us to miss the depth of this psalm.

The first two verses begin with exuberant praise. Although the emphasis is upon God as creator, there is also mention of Him being “the Rock of our salvation.” It would, of course, be impossible to place the two statements in separate categories as if there were no connection between the two. God is one and He is both our maker, and our savior, as well as our sanctifier. We cannot choose one of the three aspects and neglect the others. Israel’s history demonstrates that this would have catastrophic consequences.

The first words in both stanzas are “Come, let us....” Both words indicate that, as human beings, we are not at the place where we naturally ought to be. We are not in a position where adoration, fellowship, and rest are within our reach. In order to arrive there we have to come and draw nigh. The exhortation reminds us of the words of the prodigal son who said: “I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.”⁷⁵ This psalm was written against the background of man’s fall into sin. Although the fall is not mentioned specifically, it is clear that statements such as “do not harden your hearts as you did,” and “They shall never enter my rest” would have no contents if man would not live out of fellowship with God. To act upon the invitation “come” means entering into the feast and participating in the ecstasy of the worship. Confession of our sins has consequences that surpass our wildest imagination.

As mentioned above, it is implied that praise of God does not come naturally to man; we need exhortation. Even those who have received forgiveness do not easily come to the point of spontaneous adoration. This sets us apart from the heavenly beings. In Revelation we read that both angels and humans who surround the throne of God continuously fall down before God with shouts of joy and adoration. Sin has estranged us from reality to the point where we have to be awakened to the actuality of God’s glory. The intellectual knowledge that God is omnipresent is usually not enough to make us “sing for joy to the LORD and shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.” It is not that God is not present, but we are not there, unless we come and tell God that we are sorry for our sin. According to Zechariah, we obtain “the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of [our] sins.”⁷⁶

Singing for joy, shouting aloud, and extolling the Lord, therefore, are proof of our being forgiven. We sing for joy if we acknowledge God as “the Rock of our salvation.” I admit that I do not often get in ecstasy about my own pardon. I am probably not enough of a realist. It seems much easier to cry before the Lord than to laugh.

The little word “for” in vs. 3 gives us the reason for the joy. God does not expect us to act without insight. He created us as reasonable beings who may have access to His knowledge, wisdom and logic. Sin has made this more difficult for us but not impossible. This doesn’t mean that we have to possess a complete understanding of everything before we begin to worship. Eternity itself will not be long enough for us to analyze God’s wisdom, but there is a connection between understanding and worship. Our praise will intensify as our understanding increases.

The argumentation in vs. 3 refers to heaven: “For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods”; in vs. 4 and 5 it is earthly: “In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.” We can hardly be blamed if we understand little of conditions in heaven but we are not blind or deaf to the point where we cannot appreciate what the psalmist says about our environment on earth. It is possible to interpret vs. 3 as a comparison between God and the idols but this means little to our western mind. We are not in a position where we can interview an archangel, but from the reaction of angels as described in Revelation, we may

⁷⁴ See Heb. 3:7-4:11

⁷⁵ Luke 15:18

⁷⁶ Luke 1:59

guess what their answer to our questions might be. From what we know about the depth of the oceans, however, and from our knowledge about the distances in the universe, we have enough data to understand what is meant by: “In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him.”

The reference in the verses 4 and 5 is to the third day of creation of which we read: “And God said, ‘Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.’ And it was so. God called the dry ground ‘land,’ and the gathered waters he called ‘seas.’ And God saw that it was good.”⁷⁷ We could ask why, in this context, the emphasis is placed particularly upon this phase of creation? We can only speculate about this and suggest that the Genesis account says about the dry part of our planet: “And God called the dry land Earth,”⁷⁸ which is the part that is inhabitable to man. Before God separated the waters (which was the third act in a series of three separations), the world was not ready to receive human beings. In a sense, water is our enemy because we cannot stay alive in it. Noah’s flood is proof of this. The psalmist reminds us of the fact that the huge oceans which would spell death for us, as well as the earth which feeds us and from which we were taken, are all in God’s hand. Death and life are both in His hands. It is also possible to interpret the sea and the dry land as a picture of the whole of creation.

The second stanza introduces God again as creator, but this time in the setting of the sixth day of creation. He is our maker who created us out of the dust of the earth and made us in His image and likeness. Our most fundamental relationship with God is as a creature to his creator. We have to “bow down in worship,” and “kneel before the LORD” because He is our Maker. It is all because of Him that we are what we are.

There is an unspoken wonder in the word “come.” It implies that we are free to do this or not to do it. The fact that it is in our power to refuse is the great and awesome consequence of the fact that we bear the image of our maker. The fact that we are free to come in surrender and worship implies that our relationship with God can be a love-relationship. Without love, any going toward God would be senseless. It is love that gives meaning to our surrender. It remains true that our love is a reflection of God’s love for us. As the light of the moon is a reflection of sunlight, so our love mirrors God’s love. The Apostle John writes: “We love because he first loved us.”⁷⁹ It would also be impossible for us to come to God if Jesus Christ had not opened the way for us. The writer of the Hebrew Epistle writes: “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”⁸⁰

As we said before, the fall is nowhere mentioned in this psalm, but it casts its shadow over the whole poem. This is particularly clear in the last section of the psalm. The picture of the sheep that have to be shepherded implies that man has the tendency to go astray if left by himself. Isaiah’s definition of human nature reads: “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way...”⁸¹

From our perspective, we cannot clearly imagine what this image must have meant for the Old Testament Israelite. As a nation of shepherds they understood the characteristics of a sheep. This must have meant that it was not difficult for them either to understand the role of God as shepherd of His people. They could easily follow Ezekiel’s transition when he said: “‘You are My flock, the flock of My pasture; you are men, and I am your God,’ says the Lord GOD.”⁸² This phrase expresses at the same time man’s smallness and greatness.

The Bible has a lot to say about shepherding. The culminating statement is the one made by Jesus: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”⁸³ The author of this psalm could not have understood the full implication of God’s being Israel’s shepherd. He did not know that the fact that we are “the flock under His care” would mean that Jesus had to give His life on the cross for man’s salvation. We know the secret for which the Old Testament prophets searched intently and with the greatest care and into which even angels long to look.⁸⁴ Jesus is not only the Good Shepherd, or as the

⁷⁷ Gen. 1:9,10

⁷⁸ Gen. 1:10 (NKJV)

⁷⁹ I John 4:19

⁸⁰ Heb. 10:19-22

⁸¹ Isa. 53:6

⁸² Ezek. 34:31 (NKJV)

⁸³ John 10:11

⁸⁴ See I Peter 1:10-12

author of Hebrews calls Him “that great Shepherd of the sheep,”⁸⁵ but He is also “the Lamb, who was slain.” As such John sees Him in Revelation.⁸⁶ He became one of us and in that way “He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows,”⁸⁷ as Isaiah prophesied in such an incomparable way. If it is fitting to bow down in worship, and kneel before the Lord because He is our Maker, how much more appropriate it will be to come and bow down before the Lord our Savior, and sing: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”⁸⁸

The key to understanding this psalm is in hearing God’s voice. Vs. 7 says: “Today, if you hear his voice....” Jesus used almost the same words when He spoke about the sheep in John’s Gospel. Three times He mentioned that “the sheep hear his voice”; “the sheep follow him, for they know his voice”; and “they will hear My voice.”⁸⁹

The people of Israel were led out of Egypt during the Passover celebration and as they passed through the Red Sea. They witnessed the awesome manifestation of God’s presence on Mount Sinai, but they never heard God’s voice at that time. Rather, they heard the voice but didn’t listen. Some of the older translations insert the little word “oh” before “Today, if you hear his voice.” That little word makes vs. 7 into one of the most tragic statements in the Bible; it expresses God’s sorrow, the tears Jesus wept over us. Man has not only the freedom to come or not to come, he also has the doubtful privilege to harden his heart. We ought to keep this in mind when we read the Parable of the Sower.⁹⁰ The four kinds of soil mentioned in that parable represent four conditions of the human heart. We are responsible for the conditions of the hardened path along the side of the field, and for the stony ground, the thorns and thistles, and also the good ground of the broken heart. How else would God be able to say: “Today, if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert?”

The incidents referred to as Meribah and Massah are recorded in the books of Exodus and Numbers.⁹¹ In both cases the people’s thirst was quenched by water from the rock. The first incident occurred at Rephidim, and the second at Kadesh. Both occurrences illustrate the overall mentality of Israel during the journey in the wilderness. The psalmist could have chosen a dozen other incidents to make his point. The Holy Spirit chooses these two because in God’s memory (if we may use that expression) these episodes stand out above all other as moments where God had been particularly provoked by the conduct of His people. The decision, however, that the generation that had left Egypt would not be permitted to enter the Promised Land was not made at Rephidim or Kadesh in connection with the water that came from the rock. It happened when Israel arrived for the first time at Kadesh in the desert of Paran.⁹² That incident took place approximately 38 years before the occurrence referred to in this psalm. It was when the people arrived at Kadesh for the second time that Moses himself forfeited his right to enter Canaan. That incident seemed to be, in God’s eyes, the culmination of all the hardness of heart of the nation. Moses’ fall was representative of the condition of the whole nation. But Moses did not receive punishment as a substitution for all the people; he lost his chance to enter through his own fault. The decision that the people as a whole could not enter had already been taken long before that time. We read in Numbers that God had said: “Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times-- not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it. So tell them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you say.’”⁹³

When the incident of the water from the rock took place, during the second visit as Kadesh, most of the older generation had already died at that time. Evidently, the younger generation had learned little or nothing from their ancestors. They had hardened their hearts in the same way as their parents had done before at Rephidim. We know that faith is not hereditary but it seems that unbelief is.

⁸⁵ Heb. 13:20

⁸⁶ See Rev. 5:6,12

⁸⁷ Isa. 53:4

⁸⁸ Rev. 5:13

⁸⁹ John 10:3,4,16 (NKJV)

⁹⁰ See Matt. 13:3-10, 18-23

⁹¹ See Ex. 17:1-17; Num. 20:1-13

⁹² See Num. 13:26

⁹³ Num. 14:21-23,28

The names *Massah* and *Meribah* stand for “proving and strife”; they could be interpreted as generic names. It could be that the second incident referred to in this psalm does not concern the water from the rock at Kadesh but the people’s reaction to the report of the spies which occurred at Kadesh also.⁹⁴ The names *Massah* and *Meribah* are used freely and interchangeably throughout the Pentateuch. In Exodus both names are used for the same place at Rephidim.⁹⁵ In Numbers, only the word *Meribah* is used.⁹⁶ But in the account of the return of the spies which took place at Kadesh the names are not mentioned, not in Numbers, nor in Deuteronomy where Moses refers anew to the occurrence.⁹⁷ In view of the literal meaning of the names the use of them at those places would have been appropriate. God put Israel to the test but they failed.

At the core of unbelief is the fact that man does not accept the truth that God is good and that everything He does is motivated by His love for man. We blame God for things for which we ought to take personal responsibility or for things which are done by the devil. The book Job illustrates this point. Our problem is that we do not know ourselves, nor do we know God. When Job began to understand who God was, he understood who he was himself and what he had done and he repented of everything he had said. We read that Job said: “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”⁹⁸

Sin, pain, and suffering are no easy matters, and there are no cheap answers to the problem of pain. But this does not mean that there are no answers at all. While at Rephidim, Israel asked the question of unbelief: “Is the LORD among us or not?”⁹⁹ At Kadesh they said twice that it would have been better if they had remained in Egypt, or if they had all died in the desert.¹⁰⁰ People who were created in the image of God confessed that it would be better not to possess this dignity. It is better to be a slave or dead than to be alive and free! And they blamed God for this! The Bible calls this attitude “hardness of heart.” It is the result of not hearing and heeding the voice of God. In Hebrew there is no difference in meaning between hearing and obeying; the same word *shama`* is used for both.

It seems as if the psalm, which opened so beautifully in a major key, gets bogged down at the end in a negative minor. We get the impression that the fire is extinguished. It is true that the last verses do not contain shouts of joy; they rather speak about God’s oath as a severe warning. If, however, we work our way back up to the beginning, we understand that praise and worship are safeguards against a loss of vision and of hardening of the heart. When we recognize God as our Maker and our Savior, we will be kept from becoming a prey of the devil’s propaganda.

On the one hand, entering into the rest of God will produce praise and thanksgiving in our hearts; but also praise will open the way for us to enter into that rest.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews places this psalm in the right perspective for us. We read there the quote from this psalm, probably taken from the Septuagint: “So, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.’ So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’”¹⁰¹ In this quote the author makes clear that Israel’s entering into Canaan was an image of a greater reality of our entering into the rest of God, the celebration of the real Sabbath. He calls this “partaking of Christ.” We read: “We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.”¹⁰²

The Bible distinguishes three phases of rest: There is God’s original rest about which we read: “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.”¹⁰³ Then there is the Sabbath command as it is found in the Decalogue:

⁹⁴ See Num. 14:1-38

⁹⁵ See Ex. 17:7

⁹⁶ See Num. 20:13

⁹⁷ See Num. 14 and Deut. 1:19-46

⁹⁸ Job 42:5,6

⁹⁹ Ex. 17:7

¹⁰⁰ See Num. 14:1-4; 20:2-5

¹⁰¹ Heb. 3:7-11

¹⁰² Heb. 3:14

¹⁰³ Gen. 2:2,3

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”¹⁰⁴ And, finally, there is the rest of the entering into the Promised Land, about which our psalm says: “So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’ ” The Epistle to the Hebrews connects those by showing that the entering into Canaan, and the conquest of the land are, again, images of a spiritual reality: the rest of God after the completion of creation.

The key to understanding this lies in Jesus’ words about God’s breaking of the Sabbath. In John’s Gospel, He says: “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.”¹⁰⁵ At that point, Jesus was accused of breaking the Sabbath. God Himself broke the first Sabbath when Adam fell into sin. From that moment on, God began to work on the new creation. This creation was completed in the death of Jesus on the cross. The cleansing of sin was finished when Jesus cried out: “*Tetelestai*” (It is finished).¹⁰⁶ When Jesus rose from the dead, He introduced the new Sabbath. For this reason, we partake of this rest when we are a new creation in Jesus Christ. The author of the Hebrew Epistle says: “Anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.”¹⁰⁷ There is, of course, a difference between God’s resting and ours. Our works were works of sin. When we rest from our works, we stop sinning and we begin to enjoy our fellowship with God. Our resting from our works means that we become partakers of God’s holiness, which will allow us to see God. Entering into God’s rest, therefore, means having fellowship with God in the deepest sense of the word. When we see Him, we will become like Him because we will be filled with His glory.

The Bible teaches this in the following verses:

- “Without holiness no one will see the Lord.”¹⁰⁸
- “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”¹⁰⁹
- “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”¹¹⁰
- “They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.”¹¹¹
- “That God may be all in all.”¹¹²

In view of this hope it is not difficult to sing: “Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.”

¹⁰⁴ Ex. 20:8-11

¹⁰⁵ John 5:17

¹⁰⁶ John 19:30

¹⁰⁷ Heb. 4:10

¹⁰⁸ Heb. 12:14

¹⁰⁹ Matt. 5:8

¹¹⁰ I John 3:2

¹¹¹ Rev. 22:4

¹¹² I Cor. 15:28

PSALM NINETY-SIX

- 1 *Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth.*
- 2 *Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.*
- 3 *Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.*
- 4 *For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods.*
- 5 *For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.*
- 6 *Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.*
- 7 *Ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.*
- 8 *Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.*
- 9 *Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.*
- 10 *Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns." The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity.*
- 11 *Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it;*
- 12 *let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy;*
- 13 *they will sing before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth.*

The book First Chronicles quotes this psalm, almost in its entirety, in connection with the bringing over of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem.¹¹³ This psalm also seems to be a continuation of Psalm 95. If we compare both psalms to the words Moses spoke whenever the ark set out: "Rise up, O LORD! May your enemies be scattered; may your foes flee before you," and whenever it came to rest: "Return, O LORD, to the countless thousands of Israel"¹¹⁴ then the entering into God's rest, spoken of in Psalm 95, and in Hebrews chapter 3 and 4 is placed in a different light. It is probably because of this connection that the author of Hebrews attributes this psalm to David.¹¹⁵ There can be little doubt but this psalm is from the hand of David (or Asaph) and was composed for the occasion described in First Chronicles.¹¹⁶

The Shekinah glory of the Lord entered the city, which had been for centuries, a citadel of the enemy in the Promised Land, that had only been conquered partially. The capture of Jerusalem and the bringing over of the ark to that city made Israel into one nation under God instead of a confederacy of tribes that were spread out over the land.

David saw in this an image of God's reign over the whole earth. Few people have demonstrated such a vision and understanding of the significance of God's revelation of Himself to Israel. This psalm is an invitation to all nations to come to the place of God's revelation. That is why it is called "A New Song." This fact had never before been sung about.

"A new song" is also mentioned in Revelation. We read about the four heavenly beings that surround the throne of God and the twenty-four elders: "And they sang a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.'"¹¹⁷ And about the redeemed who are sealed by the Holy Spirit, we read: "And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth."¹¹⁸

The term "a new song" indicates that a new phase is entered upon in the history of the universe. In this psalm, this new phase is the bringing over of the ark to Jerusalem. In Revelation, it is the opening of the scroll sealed with seven seals and the celebration of salvation.

In Psalm 96 the theme is God's rule in the kingdom, in Revelation it is our rule. That is new. God's glory is eternal; that is not new. But when man who rebelled against God bows down before Him and recognizes Him as king, it means the beginning of a new creation. The greatest news, however, is the fact that God brought this about by becoming man Himself and by being slain in order to purchase us with His blood. The arrival of the ark in Jerusalem was an image of the Incarnation: "The Word became flesh

¹¹³ See I Chr. 16:23-33

¹¹⁴ Num. 10:35,36

¹¹⁵ See Heb. 4:7

¹¹⁶ I Chr. chapters 15 and 16

¹¹⁷ Rev. 5:9,10

¹¹⁸ Rev. 14:3

and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”¹¹⁹ David cannot have known how truly new this song would be. He prophesied about the fact that this song ought to be sung. We only learn about the words of the song in Revelation.

In David’s day, there was yet no question that the whole earth would come to Jerusalem to recognize that the creator of everything had revealed Himself on earth. We may say that David’s vision was premature. Other nations would have considered David’s thoughts to be inappropriate: a sign of inflated nationalism. But David knew God sufficiently to realize that YHWH was no local deity. He is the great king. “He comes to judge the earth.”

The wide scope of this psalm catches our attention. The whole earth is involved; all the nations. “The field is the world.”¹²⁰ This psalm gives us a powerful stimulus to world evangelism. Sin has limited our horizon and has steeped us in a village-mentality. The builders of the tower of Babel did not want to be scattered over the face of the whole earth. We read in the Genesis account: “Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, ‘Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.’ They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.’”¹²¹

The Holy Spirit opens our eyes for the fields that surround us and gives us a realistic vision. When our eyes are opened and we begin to see who God is, we will also know what our task on earth involves. The people in Babel had turned things around. They wanted to build a tower that reached to the heavens because they did not realize that God would come down to earth. We read, however, “but the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building.”¹²²

David had to work with models on a small scale. He ordered the ark, a chest of about one cubic foot, to be brought over to a relatively small city which he had recently conquered, but he understood the magnitude of what he did. He may not have known about the incarnation but he grasped the essence of it. He knew that it was about the Name of God among the nations. The essence of God’s glory was present in Jerusalem and this made Jerusalem the center of the whole earth.

It is man’s task to compose “a new song” for this occasion. To praise God is the greatest thing man can do on earth. God has equipped us to do this because He created us in His image and likeness. Sin has damaged the image but it has not eliminated it. Through the redemption in Jesus Christ, of which the ark is a shadow, praise and worship have again come within our reach.

The verses 1-3 give us a four-fold task to fulfill: to sing, to praise, to proclaim, and to declare. The first two are directed toward God, the last ones toward man. All four are, actually, facets of the same act. Singing and praising God’s Name are, at the same time, a proclamation and a declaration. We cannot do one and not the other; praising God is evangelism and missionary work means glorifying God. The salvation of souls is a byproduct. The core is the glory of God.

Although the first two stanzas of this psalm are clearly poetical parallels, the first is addressed to people who know God, which is to Israel, and the second contains the message Israel has to declare. It is a commission and an admonition to those who had never seen God from close by.

The nations who did not know the God of Israel worshipped idols. Idols are, at best, lifeless statues. But idolatry often opens a door for Satan to come in. Idolatry brings man into contact with demons. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.”¹²³ In this psalm, however, the stress is upon the lifeless character and powerlessness of the idols, more than upon the satanic aspect of idolatry. No piece of wood or stone can stand up in a comparison with the living God. Everything owes its existence to Him. He is the creator of heaven and earth who sustains all things by his powerful word.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ John 1:14

¹²⁰ Matt. 13:38

¹²¹ Gen. 11:1-4

¹²² Gen. 11:5

¹²³ I Cor. 10:19,20

¹²⁴ See Heb. 1:3

In vs. 3 “His glory” and “His marvelous deeds” are poetical parallels. When we place this verse next to vs. 5, we understand that the “marvelous deeds” are the miracles of creation. Man can learn enough from creation to be without excuse if he refuses to honor God and turns to idols. Paul says in Romans: “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities-his eternal power and divine nature-have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”¹²⁵ Yet, we are under obligation to tell the message that ought to be clear to everyone without being told. Sinful man does not draw logical conclusions from what he can see around him. It is not enough for man to know that God is his creator. This knowledge cannot save him from his sin. Salvation is only found in Jesus Christ.

The bringing of the ark to Jerusalem symbolized not only God’s presence in Israel, it also stood for the place where the blood of the sacrifice had to be sprinkled. God revealed Himself above the mercy seat. It was not only God’s omnipotence that reduced the idols and demons to a lifeless futility, but also His righteousness, His love, and His grace. All this is represented in the Ark of the Covenant.

In these verses, the accent is upon the heavenly glory. The earth should know how great the glory of heaven is. The Seraphim in Isaiah’s vision were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”¹²⁶ The time has not yet come when this glory covers the whole earth. Habakkuk, therefore, prophesied: “For the earth *will* be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”¹²⁷

In verses 7 and 8 we find the threefold command: “ascribe to the LORD glory and strength,” “bring an offering and come into his courts.” The word “ascribe” is used three times in these verses. God’s glory is, of course, not dependent upon whether we ascribe it to Him or not. We cannot give to Him what is already His. What the verses tell us is that we have to recognize the reality of God’s glory and strength.

This recognition also implies that we agree with this glory, and that we confess that God has the right to possess this glory, and that it would be wrong for us to ascribe this glory to someone else. This recognition is of great importance in connection with the cosmic struggle between God and Satan. It is important that His own creatures justify God. The book Revelation exhibits this principle over and over again. If all the nations of the earth recognize this and come into His courts on the basis of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, then the mandate of the preaching of the Gospel is finished. This would mean that the Lord could return. In Jesus’ own words: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”¹²⁸

Vs. 9 – “Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness,” can also be rendered with: “Worship the LORD in holy attire.”¹²⁹ This reminds us of the parable of the king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son and required that all his guests wear wedding clothes. We read: “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless.”¹³⁰ To appear at such a feast and refuse the clothing that was made available by the host at the beginning of the feast was the greatest insult. We read in Revelation how our own clothes can be transformed into wedding clothes. About those who have come out of the great tribulation it is said: “they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”¹³¹ The holy attire, therefore, represents what God has done for us in declaring us righteous in Jesus Christ. Those who are wearing such attire may enter boldly into God’s presence. All others will tremble before Him. This doesn’t mean that there will be no awe and deep respect for God with the righteous; intimacy with God would not be possible without a sense of awe. This is the marvel of our fellowship with God.

The message of vs. 10: “Say among the nations, ‘The LORD reigns’ ” is similar to the message John the Baptist and Jesus Himself preached: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”¹³² We can hardly take in a physical sense the second part of that verse: “The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved.” Our planet will not exist eternally. The Apostle Peter wrote: “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth

¹²⁵ Rom. 1:20

¹²⁶ Isa. 6:3

¹²⁷ Hab. 2:14

¹²⁸ Matt. 24:14

¹²⁹ NASU

¹³⁰ Matt. 22:11-12

¹³¹ Rev. 7:15

¹³² Matt. 3:2; 4:17

and everything in it will be laid bare.”¹³³ The immovability of the earth is related to God’s righteousness and His judgment. We live in a world that is steeped in moral darkness. The foundations of human society have come loose. But the coming of the Lord as king and judge will mean healing for the nations. These words are, undoubtedly, a prophecy about the rule of our Lord Jesus Christ during the Millennium, but the principle of the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven is also an integral part of the Gospel. Every person who accepts the Gospel of Jesus Christ experiences something of this fundamental moral change in his life. We, who have been washed in the blood of Jesus, are the first ones to fall under this righteous judgment. We do this on a daily basis. This is the reason we can participate in the joy that surrounds us: the rejoicing of the heavens, and the gladness of the earth, the resounding of the sea, and the jubilant cries of the fields with the singing of the trees of the forest. The joy of all of nature is ours as we belong to Him and His righteousness. What riches are expressed in these images! How good it is if we can see the connection between the beauty of nature and the righteousness of God! If the trees of the forest sing for joy, how can we, as living moral beings, endued with thought and reason, bearers of God’s image, lag behind! Upon His entering Jerusalem, Jesus spoke to the Pharisees: “I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”¹³⁴ In the church of Jesus Christ, we give priority to the stones, to our impoverishment.

He comes! Maranatha! Our singing for joy is closely related to our hope of the coming of our Lord Jesus. Both the expectation of His coming and the joy that comes with it have weakened considerably in the church of our day. Personally, I count more on the possibility that the Lord will take me one day through death than that He will come again. Yet, the last words of the Bible are: “Yes, I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”¹³⁵

It sounds like a strange paradox that the Holy Spirit, after describing in detail the end times and the demonstration of the power of Satan, would speak about the soon return of the Lord. Satan is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.¹³⁶ God’s enemy takes the words “He comes” much more seriously than the people who expect Him. God is righteous and just. We do better to put our trust in Him. His absolute norms will be applied on this sick world. This is a good reason for the singing of a new song.

¹³³ II Pet. 3:10

¹³⁴ Luke 19:40

¹³⁵ Rev. 22:20

¹³⁶ See Rev. 12:12

PSALM NINETY-SEVEN

1. *The LORD reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice.*
2. *Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.*
3. *Fire goes before him and consumes his foes on every side.*
4. *His lightning lights up the world; the earth sees and trembles.*
5. *The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth.*
6. *The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory.*
7. *All who worship images are put to shame, those who boast in idols--worship him, all you gods!*
8. *Zion hears and rejoices and the villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments, O LORD.*
9. *For you, O LORD, are the Most High over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods.*
10. *Let those who love the LORD hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.*
11. *Light is shed upon the righteous and joy on the upright in heart.*
12. *Rejoice in the LORD, you who are righteous, and praise his holy name.*

This psalm continues the theme of God's universal rule that was first sung about in Psalm 93. *The Tyndale Commentary* explains that the accent is slightly different in this psalm. In the previous psalm, the return of the Lord is seen as the homecoming of the beloved master; here the emphasis is more upon the triumphant entry of a victorious hero.

The horizon is here even wider than in the previous psalm. "The distant shores" is in Hebrew "the islands," meaning the uttermost parts of the earth, the most remote borders of human civilization. The gladness and joy come, of course, from those who have placed themselves on the side of YHWH. In vs. 10, they are called "those who love the LORD." This contrast between those who have chosen the Lord's side and those who are against Him runs through the whole psalm.

The paradox between God's character, which John describes with the words "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all"¹³⁷ and the darkness that surrounds Him can only be explained by those who have actually seen God. The darkness is in man, not in God. It is difficult to see "Clouds and thick darkness" as a poetical parallel to "righteousness and justice." God reveals Himself in clouds and thick darkness to those who have abandoned righteousness and justice as the foundation of their lives.

We find a parallel to these verses in Hebrews,¹³⁸ where we also see the two sides of God's revelation of Himself: for those who resist Him and those who have accepted His redemption in Jesus Christ. The phrase "for our God is a consuming fire"¹³⁹ is, undoubtedly, based upon vs. 3 of this psalm.

Vs. 5 – "The mountains melt like wax before the LORD" in the context of this psalm is, probably, an image of man's resistance being broken. A similar image, although with symbols of an opposite nature, is found in the dream of king Nebuchadnezzar, where the stone that demolished the statue became a mountain that covered the whole earth.¹⁴⁰ All this is the result of the coming of the Lord which was sung about in the last verse of the previous psalm. The Lord's coming to judge the earth means the end of all unrighteousness. This great event is also sung about in the opening verses of Revelation: "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen."¹⁴¹

The resistance against God's rule that is mentioned in the first stanza is further analyzed in the second. Man's unrighteousness is the result of that which forms the core of his life: idolatry. Only the person who loves God will be able to demonstrate righteousness and justice in his life. Serving God implies surrender of self. The motive for idolatry is self-preservation. Man thinks, deep in his heart, that he will be able to manipulate the gods he serves. He lives under the illusion that he serves himself, but often too late, he discovers that behind the piece of wood or the dead stone hides a dark power that is out to exterminate him. It is not true that man has three options to choose from: God, the devil, or himself. Choices are only limited to the first two whether we like it or not.

¹³⁷ I John 1:5

¹³⁸ See Heb. 12:18-29

¹³⁹ Heb. 12:29

¹⁴⁰ See Dan. 2:34,35,44,45

¹⁴¹ Rev. 1:7

In C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the author uses the phrase "The dwarfs for the dwarfs." This is a good description of man's attitude. But in the last volume of that series, *The Last Battle*, Lewis seems to go astray. I can accept the concept of the Calorman soldier Emeth who thought he served Tash but in reality had a heart for Aslan. In that book, Lewis pictures the dwarfs in eternity, left by themselves, belonging neither to Tash or to Aslan. That is not an option; if they were not with Aslan they would have been swallowed up by Tash, whom they served without knowing it.

When the psalmist writes: "All who worship images are put to shame," he does not merely infer that the idol worshippers will be ashamed when they discover that they bowed down before a worthless object. Whether man meddles with demonic powers and loses in the process or surrenders his life to God, in both cases he is a loser. Those who surrender to God admit to have lost. Without consciousness of what the norm of life is it would be impossible for man to feel ashamed. A feeling of shame indicates a connection with the image of God. Only "the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."¹⁴²

The question in vs. 7 is what is meant with the word "gods." It can hardly apply to the idols mentioned previously because those are lifeless statues. It could refer to the spiritual powers that are behind the idols, but nowhere in the Bible are demons invited to worship God. Angels would not fit into the context of this psalm. At some places in Scripture, human beings are addressed as "god."¹⁴³ It is possible that the phrase "worship him, all you gods!" has a broader meaning and that it stands for man's turning away from idols in order to worship God. The Apostle Paul uses this concept when he writes to the Christians in Thessalonica: "For they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God."¹⁴⁴

It is also not clear what is meant with the words "Zion hears." The reason given is "because of your judgments." If, like the previous psalm, this psalm was composed to celebrate the coming of the ark to Jerusalem, it is possible that the reference here is to the judgment that was passed on the idol Dagon when the Philistines placed the ark in front of his statue.¹⁴⁵ That incident took place some 70 or 80 years earlier in Israel's history. The memory of the event would have lived on as a proof of God's superiority over the idols. Such proofs are not superfluous. Such demonstrations are a strong impetus to our faith. But the Israelites who brought the ark over to Jerusalem did not have to go that far back in history. The capture of the city of Jerusalem and the defeat of the Philistine army were events that were miraculous enough to demonstrate Yahweh's superiority over the idols.¹⁴⁶

The last stanza of this psalm describes the duties and privileges of a child of God. The verses are addressed to "those who love the LORD." The essence of our relationship with God is love. This love is the response of our entire being to God's love for us. The Apostle John writes: "We love because he first loved us."¹⁴⁷ Our love for God does not bring about an automatic protection against temptations. We have to consciously take a stand against evil. No perfect love for God is possible without an absolute hatred for all that is not in accordance with God's holiness. It is painful to realize that we need this kind of admonition. We tend to compromise. Our only salvation consists in placing ourselves under the protection of the blood and the Name of Jesus Christ. Without this safekeeping we would never display any love for God at all.

This protection is also a guarantee against the power of the enemy. We have seen elsewhere that our fellowmen can kill us or can make life bitter for us. Our Lord Jesus Himself was not spared and there is no promise that we will be spared suffering. But the almighty God puts Himself as a surety for our soul. Men and demons can only incur temporary damage to our lives; our eternal salvation is guaranteed.

The Tyndale Commentary observes that "Light dawns for the righteous"¹⁴⁸ is a better rendering of vs. 11 than "Light is shed upon the righteous." Sowing of light seems to be a mixed up metaphor. The Book of Proverbs says: "The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day."¹⁴⁹ This is, undoubtedly, the thought that this verse wants to express. There is an increase of light as we continue to walk with the Lord. Our walk is toward the light.

¹⁴² Rom. 9:33

¹⁴³ See Ps. 82 and John 10:34

¹⁴⁴ I Thess. 1:9

¹⁴⁵ See I Sam. 5:1-8

¹⁴⁶ See II Sam. 5

¹⁴⁷ I John 4:19

¹⁴⁸ RSV

¹⁴⁹ Prov. 4:18

The Bible speaks a lot about the subject. Light has a moral connotation in this context. The physical light our eyes observe is an image of the true light. When God said on the first day of creation: "Let there be light!"¹⁵⁰ it was not the light of the sun that appeared. The light of that day was also physical light but the source of it is unknown. As an image, however, that light was closer to the real light than sunlight. The Apostle Paul draws a line from the image to reality when he says: "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."¹⁵¹ Increase of light means an increase of the knowledge of the glory of God which entails that we make the right moral choices in life. It is inconceivable that our insight into the character of God would deepen and that we would continue to live in sin. Sin goes together with darkness; light and holiness belong together.

Light also goes together with joy. The two are parallels. Our joy is anchored in our fellowship with God, not in favorable circumstances.

The words "righteous" and "upright" are of great importance. They illuminate both sides of our salvation. A righteous person is one who has been justified by God; an upright man is someone who does not hide anything from God.

In the context of this psalm, the rejoicing in the Lord of the righteous is based, primarily, on the fact that God is king. In this case our joy is, in fact, stimulated by circumstances. Or rather, our interpretation of the circumstances brings us closer to reality. We are often the victims of the devil's brainwashing and it is difficult to see through the appearance of things. The reality is found in Christ, as Paul says.¹⁵² Nobody ever expressed this so beautifully as the prophet Habakkuk: "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior."¹⁵³

"Rejoice in the Lord" is put in the Imperative. It is expected of us that we will obey this command. The same is true for "praise his holy name." We see in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ how this is put in practice. When it became clear to Him that the leaders of Israel would not accept the Gospel, He prayed: "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children."¹⁵⁴ Luke preambles this prayer with the words: "At that time Jesus, *full of joy through the Holy Spirit*, said..."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ Gen. 1:3

¹⁵¹ II Cor. 4:6

¹⁵² Col. 2:17

¹⁵³ Hab. 3:17-18

¹⁵⁴ Matt. 11:25

¹⁵⁵ Luke 10:21

PSALM NINETY-EIGHT

1 A psalm.

Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.

2 The LORD has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations.

3 He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen

the salvation of our God.

4 Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music;

5 make music to the LORD with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing,

6 with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn-- shout for joy before the LORD, the King.

7 Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

8 Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy;

9 let them sing before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness

and the peoples with equity.

The Tyndale Commentary says about this psalm: "Known as the *Cantate Domino* ('O sing to the Lord'), this psalm was interposed in the Book of Common Prayer between the evening Old Testament reading and its New Testament fulfillment." The theme is the same as in the previous and the following psalms but this psalm sounds a spontaneous and pure tone of joy without establishing a connection between the coming of the Lord and the consequences His return will have for man. As in the preceding psalm, there is mention of "a new song." Here also, we may see the connection with the new song that is sung in Revelation.¹⁵⁶ We may see the verses that speak about a new song in the Book of Psalms as a prophecy of which the song in Revelation is the fulfillment. So the praise of this psalm is not pure praise without any connection to certain events in the future. The Bible doesn't know "art for art's sake." Praise always makes reference to the character and acts of God. It is quite likely that this psalm was composed for the occasion of the bringing over of the ark to Jerusalem.

There are three words that give the reason for this praise, "marvelous things" (the Hebrew uses the single word *pala'*), "victory," (for the Hebrew word *yasha'*), and "salvation" (Hebrew - *yeshuw'ah*). The NIV renders the last two words both with "salvation."

The Tyndale Commentary observes about the word "victory": "Victory, the word which dominates this stanza (1,2,3) and calls for a new song ... is a richer word in Scripture than with us. Its chief aspect is 'salvation,' as in the name 'Jesus'; so it looks at both friend (with salvation) and foe (with victory), and is big enough to combine the hard decisiveness of the latter with the compassion and constructiveness of the former. This salvation/victory is wholly supernatural, a single-handed exploit of the Lord."

"Supernatural" is a hard-to--define concept. Our knowledge of the laws of nature is, to say the least, limited. Some phenomena are difficult to explain because we cannot observe them frequently enough to formulate a law that governs them. We tend to call such phenomena "supernatural." The mere fact that certain events occur only once does not mean that they would not be caused by explainable causes. Laws of nature are rules God laid down into creation to guarantee the progress and preservation of creation. For this reason laws of nature are just as much expressions of God's beings as moral laws. Seen from that perspective, we can say that there are no supernatural occurrences. God does not play magic tricks.

We also have little understanding about the extent of damage that was caused by the appearance of sin in the world. There are things we consider to be natural which are in direct opposition to God's original intent with creation. Sickness and death are unnatural, and yet we have to admit that there are laws of nature involved when a human body decomposes at death. When Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, healed people, and raised some from the dead, and rose from the dead Himself, nothing supernatural happened; He merely rehabilitated the laws of nature that God intended to be originally. Yet, these are miracles, because when God performs miracles, He makes that which had become sub-natural natural again. That which is sick becomes healthy, and that which was dead becomes alive, injustice is replaced by justice. God performs such miracles all the time.

¹⁵⁶ See Rev. 5:9

Israel's history is a monument of God's miraculous interventions. The Old Testament gives us a reliable testimony on this point. The exodus from Egypt, the conquest of Canaan, and above all, the physical revelation of God's glory are miracles that introduce a new creation. "Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things."

As we mentioned before, this psalm is, probably, one of the songs David composed, or had composed, at the occasion of the transfer of the ark to Jerusalem. That being the case, this psalm expresses David's insight into the meaning of God's revelation to Israel for the benefit of the whole world. The covenant God made with Israel, which is referred to in vs. 3, intended the salvation of the whole world. Salvation is from the Jews, as Jesus told the Samaritan woman, but it is not for the Jews alone.¹⁵⁷ God saved Israel from Egypt in order to save all the people from the slavery of sin and bring them into the rest of His salvation. He brought about this victory, this salvation which is the topic of this stanza, in Jesus Christ.

The Tyndale Commentary shows the relationship between the fact that God gained this victory single-handedly, without outside help, and certain portions of Isaiah that emphasize this truth. We read there: "Truth is nowhere to be found, and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey. The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak. According to what they have done, so will he repay wrath to his enemies and retribution to his foes; he will repay the islands their due. From the west, men will fear the name of the LORD, and from the rising of the sun, they will revere his glory. For he will come like a pent-up flood that the breath of the LORD drives along. 'The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,' declares the LORD."¹⁵⁸

And: "Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? 'It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.' Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? 'I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come. I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support; so my own arm worked salvation for me, and my own wrath sustained me. I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground.'¹⁵⁹

This salvation is brought about exclusively by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ of whom the ark is a representation. The salvation of the world is found in the cross of Golgotha. This theme connects this new song with the one in Revelation: "You were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."¹⁶⁰ This is the marvelous thing, the blessing, and the salvation.

The strangest feature of the world in which we live is the almost complete lack of reaction to the proclamation of this salvation. Such apathy is incomprehensible to the angels in heaven. We see in the announcement of the angel to the shepherds in Ephrathah how the heavens reacted. We read in Luke's Gospel: "Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.'¹⁶¹ It must be an enigma to the angels that such a message would leave the world cold. This is the clearest proof of how great the damage is that sin caused.

The miracles God performed in bringing about this salvation will ultimately result in the coming of the Lord to judge the earth. This statement is meant to be both a promise and a warning. The Apostle Paul uses this theme several times in his preaching. To the philosophers in Athens, for instance, he says: "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone-- an image made by man's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice

¹⁵⁷ See John 4:22

¹⁵⁸ Isa. 59:15-20

¹⁵⁹ Isa. 63:1-6

¹⁶⁰ Rev.5:9

¹⁶¹ Luke 2:13,14

by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”¹⁶² And in his testimony to the Roman governor Felix we read: “Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, ‘That’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.’”¹⁶³ To us who are in Christ Jesus, the Scriptures say: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.”¹⁶⁴

This is the reason for the shouts of joy and the jubilant song in the second stanza of this psalm. The verses 4-6 state, particularly, that it is man’s duty to praise the Lord. This praise is both spontaneous and rehearsed. It takes talent as well as exercise to play a harp, a trumpet, and a ram’s horn. We are supposed to praise God with our talents and to work hard at it. This doesn’t mean that our emotions may not overwhelm us also, and these verses are heavily loaded with emotions.

When man praises God, nature joins in the chorus: the sea, the rivers, and the mountains participate in this hymn of praise, but man is the conductor. In this respect also sin has reversed the roles. The world is topsy-turvy. The psalmist says: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”¹⁶⁵ The Flemish poet Guido Gezelle expresses this so beautifully in his poem:

“When the soul listens, every living thing speaks a language.
Even the softest whisper has meaning and points to something.
Clouds, sky, wind, the path of God’s holy foot
Express and interpret the deeply hidden word so sweetly,
When the soul listens.”

God’s majesty is clearly visible in the oceans, the mountain ranges, and the valleys; in the flora and the fauna, in the colors of the light and the darkness of the night. An order of Protestant sisters in Germany¹⁶⁶ has taken it upon themselves to place markers at various points in the German landscape to remind the people of the fact that God created the beauty they behold.

The birds and the flowers, however, are unable to interpret the beauty that surrounds us. God gave man a mind to understand and emotions to appreciate this. Even in a broken world and in nature that is subjected to frustration, the demonstrations of God’s glory break through all over the place. How then will it be when the Lord returns and righteousness will again be the basis of life? This is the jubilant shout of this psalm. The theme is, what the Bible calls, “hope.” This is not a vague wishing that reaches toward uncertain possibilities but a stimulating certainty based on the promise of Him who cannot lie and whose omnipotence guarantees the fulfillment. The Lord comes! Parousia. Maranatha. “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² Acts 17:29-31

¹⁶³ Acts 24:24-25

¹⁶⁴ John 5:24 (NKJ)

¹⁶⁵ Ps. 19:1

¹⁶⁶ The Marien Schwestern

¹⁶⁷ Rev. 22:20

PSALM NINETY-NINE

- 1** *The LORD reigns, let the nations tremble; he sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake.*
- 2** *Great is the LORD in Zion; he is exalted over all the nations.*
- 3** *Let them praise your great and awesome name-- he is holy.*
- 4** *The King is mighty, he loves justice-- you have established equity; in Jacob you have done what is just and right.*
- 5** *Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy.*
- 6** *Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel was among those who called on his name; they called on the LORD and he answered them.*
- 7** *He spoke to them from the pillar of cloud; they kept his statutes and the decrees he gave them.*
- 8** *O LORD our God, you answered them; you were to Israel a forgiving God, though you punished their misdeeds.*
- 9** *Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his holy mountain, for the LORD our God is holy.*

This Psalm continues the theme of God's reign which runs like a thread of gold through this series of psalms (96-100). We go out from the supposition that all these psalms are related to the bringing over of the ark to Jerusalem. Each psalm highlights a different aspect of God's reign. In Psalm 96 the accent is upon the worldwide extent of the kingdom. In Psalm 97 the difference between God and the idols is accentuated. Psalm 98 celebrates God's reign in tones of pure jubilation, and in the psalm we are presently studying, God's holiness is emphasized.

We find the word "holy" three times in this psalm.¹⁶⁸ This threefold repetition reminds us of Isaiah's vision in which he hears the seraphs sing: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."¹⁶⁹ Ezekiel saw the same appearance in his vision described in the first chapter of his book, and the Apostle John depicts the throne in heaven with God sitting on it. We read there that the four living creatures cry out continuously: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."¹⁷⁰

For us, as human beings, the word "holy" contains a great mystery. It draws us to God in a way that surpasses our comprehension. We can relate to most of God's attributes because we find traces of them in our own being. Knowledge, power, and love, for instance, are characteristics we can understand, although we cannot imagine what it means that God possesses those in an eternal and infinite measure. But holiness overwhelms and perplexes us. We can grasp intuitively that God's holiness represents all that we are not. It is God's holiness that makes us understand that God is more than we are. God is not merely like us only greater and better; God is holy and we are not. Holiness is more than the sum of God's attributes; it is the essence of His being. God can add to the knowledge we already possess, and He can increase the love that is already there. but when He makes us share in His holiness (which is what He does), He impart something to us that was not there before: He gives us Himself.

The theme of Leviticus, which is "Be holy for I am holy," indicates not only that God's holiness is meant for us but also that this holiness is expressed in our moral conduct. The fact that we seldom take this seriously causes us to stand before God with fear and trembling. This is the reason Isaiah cried out: "Woe to me! I am ruined!"¹⁷¹ Ezekiel was unable to speak after he had the vision. John fell down before Jesus' feet as dead. The most frightening verse in the Bible is Revelation 20:11 where the Apostle John says: "Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them." If we have never trembled before God in this manner, we do not live in a real world. When, during the bringing over of the ark to Jerusalem, Uzzah died because he touched the ark inadvertently, David was deeply shocked.¹⁷² He realized how dangerous it is when man takes God's holiness lightly. This is what we do when we play with sin. As New Testament Christians, we are not confronted by a physical presence of God as was the case at the transportation of the ark. To us, God's

¹⁶⁸ See vs. 3,5,and 9

¹⁶⁹ Isa. 6:3

¹⁷⁰ Rev. 4:8

¹⁷¹ Isa. 6:5

¹⁷² See II Sam. 6:6-10

presence is a spiritual reality. This makes the matter more urgent to us. We ought to be able to better identify with the issues in this psalm than David himself could.

It is clear that Zion is more than a relatively small area David had chosen as a place for the ark. Solomon realized this when he dedicated the temple with the words: "But will God really dwell on earth with men? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!"¹⁷³ God's greatness and His sitting enthroned between the cherubim are two paradoxical statements. We should, therefore, see Zion as an image of the heavenly reality. The real Zion is in heaven, where John also saw Jesus standing on Mount Zion. We read in Revelation: "Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads."¹⁷⁴

Seen from our perspective, we can understand the danger that in David's time there was no line of separation between "church and state." Religious services and nationalistic feelings freely ran together. We see in world history examples which make us shudder of nations that wanted to impose their religion or their ideology upon other nations. Such satanic imitations, however, do not prove that there would not exist a real model. God wanted Israel to be a source of His revelation to the world for the salvation of all people. The fact that the Jews never really functioned as a kingdom of priests does not mean that salvation is not from the Jews.

Israel's failure merely accentuates the sinful condition of man but this does in no way diminish God's greatness. "Great is the LORD in Zion." He is also great in Bethlehem and at Golgotha. He is king but His kingdom is not of this world. Yet Israel could have reached the highest position among the nations of the world that any people could reach. David recognizes that the God of Israel is exalted over all the nations in the world. The fact that God revealed Himself to Israel does not exclude all other nations. The whole world will ultimately recognize God as the Lord. The Apostle Paul writes: "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."¹⁷⁵ In this psalm, David reaches toward this climax in the history of the universe. The ark was transported to Jerusalem; the Word has become flesh and has dwelt among us in order that all nations would praise God's great and awesome Name.

Vs. 4 reads literally in Hebrew: "Strength also [is] the king's; you love judgment." The NIV renders this rather literally with: "The King is mighty, he loves justice." Some other renderings are: "The king's strength also loveth justice" (ASV), "Mighty King, lover of justice" (RSV), "This mighty King is determined to give justice" (TLB). The point is that there is harmony between God's strength and justice. Justice is no hindrance for strength but it determines the boundaries of strength in a natural and logical fashion. The relationship between love, strength, and justice demonstrates this. Just as God's love finds its full expression in His omnipotence, so is His omnipotence fully expressed in His justice. All God's attributes are fully balanced.

Israel was never a brilliant example of a state where justice reigned supremely but the foundations of justice were there. The Ten Commandments were the constitution for all spiritual and moral relationships. The details of these commandments are further worked out in the last three books of the Pentateuch. All this is an expression of God's character which put an imprint upon the daily life of Israel. The fact that no Israelite lived a holy life does not detract anything from this principle. One could distinguish traces of God's greatness by looking at Israel.

When the queen of Sheba visited Solomon, we read: "When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built, the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the LORD, she was overwhelmed. She said to the king, 'The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard. How happy your men must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the LORD's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king, to maintain justice and righteousness.'"¹⁷⁶ Such discoveries ought to bring people to their knees in worship. If her majesty's words

¹⁷³ II Chr. 6:18

¹⁷⁴ Rev. 14:1

¹⁷⁵ Phil. 2:10,11

¹⁷⁶ I Kings 10:4-9

were more than a polite compliment, they surely benefited the spiritual life of the whole nation of Sheba. There are indications in the Bible, such as the conversion of Ethiopian eunuch,¹⁷⁷ that, for centuries, there was a certain spiritual hunger in that part of Africa. God's greatness and holiness brings us to our knees; His love and grace lift us up.

In the second stanza of this psalm, David reaches back into Israel's history. Moses and Aaron are representatives of the exodus from Egypt and the journey through the desert. We may call this period the birth of Israel as a nation. The exodus opened a new chapter in the history of salvation. In Samuel, the theocracy reached both its pinnacle and its end. During Saul's reign, the distinction between Israel and the other nations ceased to exist. But Moses, Aaron, and Samuel are mainly mentioned here because of their personal relationship with God. David calls all three of them priests although the official title only applied to Aaron. But God wanted the whole nation of Israel to be a kingdom of priests.¹⁷⁸ Moses, Aaron, and Samuel were examples of what all Israel ought to be. There are some dramatic moments in the biographies of Moses and Samuel when God answered their prayers instantaneously. In Aaron's life story, we find no such dramatic moments. Aaron was the high priest who called upon God daily in behalf of the whole nation. Although it was less apparent, God heard Aaron's prayers more often than those of the other two. For us who tend to pay more attention to that which is sensational, this fact teaches us a lesson.

The examples David quotes emphasize, at the same time, man's failure. Aaron and Samuel not only interceded for sinful human beings they were themselves fallible. They interceded for others, but they needed themselves to be interceded for. The sins of Moses and Aaron are obvious enough, so they do not need our special attention. On the Day of Atonement, Aaron could not make atonement for the people until he had first brought the blood of his own sacrifice within the veil. Samuel's sin is less apparent. The fact that Israel asked for a king was partly related to the education Samuel had given to his own children. His sons did not turn out much better than the sons of Eli. We read about them: "But his sons did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice."¹⁷⁹ About Eli's sons the Scriptures testify: "This sin of the young men was very great in the LORD's sight, for they were treating the LORD's offering with contempt."¹⁸⁰ Eli must have been Samuel's model both in good and bad but this did not release Samuel of his own responsibility. In conclusion, we can say that the examples that are mentioned awakened the longing for the real judge to appear: He who would be perfect, who would not need to first receive pardon for His own sins.

Vs. 7 applies, of course, exclusively to Moses and Aaron. Nowhere in Scripture do we read that God spoke to Samuel from the pillar of cloud. This mode of divine manifestation, evidently, ceased as Israel entered Canaan. The Bible emphasizes particularly Moses' unique and intimate relationship with God. We read God's own testimony about Moses in Numbers: "When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD."¹⁸¹ In the light of what the writer to the Hebrews says about Moses,¹⁸² this form of intimacy takes on greater depth. In Jesus Christ, our relationship with God is more intimate and real than that of Moses and Aaron ever was!

It sounds paradoxical that Aaron and Moses kept God's statutes and decrees and, at the same time, received forgiveness. We should remember, however, that the law consisted of two parts: the moral law, and the ceremonial law. This distinction may be expressed in the two different terms used as parallels in vs. 7. The NIV uses the words "statutes" and "decrees" as translations for the Hebrew *edah* and *choq*. According to *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, *edah* "refers to the Ten Commandments as a solemn divine charge or duty. In particular, it represents those commandments as written on the tablets and existing as a reminder and 'testimony' of Israel's relationship and responsibility to God." The same law that demanded obedience to God's commandments provided forgiveness for those who sinned. The sacrifices of the ceremonial law were meant to atone for the trespasses of the moral law. When it is stated, therefore, that a person kept the law, it doesn't mean that he is sinless (although that was the ideal) but that his sins had been paid for by the blood of a third party, in the Old Testament a sacrificial animal. An

¹⁷⁷ See Acts 8:26-40

¹⁷⁸ See Ex. 19:6

¹⁷⁹ I Sam. 8:3

¹⁸⁰ See I Sam. 2:12-17

¹⁸¹ Num. 12:6-8

¹⁸² See Heb. 3:1-6

unimpeachable person, in the Biblical sense, is a person who has received pardon. That this truth does not release a person of responsibility for his acts is clear from vs. 8: "You were to Israel a forgiving God, though you punished their misdeeds." Grace is no license for riotous living.

The point in these verses is that man can call upon God and receive an answer. There is salvation in fellowship with God. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."¹⁸³ This is an historical fact; historical persons have proved this truth. This is the essence of Israel's history. That which is true for Israel is true for the entire world. Salvation is from the Jews. God revealed Himself in Jerusalem. But the important thing, says Jesus, is not the place but the Spirit in which we worship the Father. We read in John's Gospel: "A time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."¹⁸⁴ If we are conscious of the holiness of the God of Israel and call upon Him as Father, then we belong to "the true worshipers."

¹⁸³ Rom. 10:13

¹⁸⁴ John 4:21-24

PSALM ONE HUNDRED

A psalm. For giving thanks

- 1 Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.**
- 2 Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.**
- 3 Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.**
- 4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.**
- 5 For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.**

This is the last psalm in the series that began with Psalm 93 in which the theme is the reign of God. Here, our relationship with God is reduced to its most elementary factors. "It is he who made us." This is what determines our relationship: He is our Creator and we are His creatures. This fact requires of us a threefold response: Shout, worship, and come!

The Hebrew words are more expressive; shout is the translation of the Hebrew *ruwa`* which means, "to split the ears." The KJV renders it with "make a joyful noise." The Hebrew word translated with "worship" is *abad* which can be rendered with "to become a slave." Shouting and serving as a slave are used as parallel expressions in this psalm. This indicates that our praise is not to be a senseless ecstasy but a practical form of joyful obedience to the will of God. God has created us so that we would obey Him with great joy. Joy is a sense of deep satisfaction which is a byproduct of obedience. Our word "worship service" would be a good way to emphasize this double aspect of our relationship with God. This kind of fellowship is also expressed in the phrase "Come before him with joyful songs."

Obedience and fellowship go together as much as does obedience and joy. When Jesus chose His disciples, we read that the primary consideration was "that they might be with Him." Mark's Gospel reports: "He appointed twelve-designating them apostles-that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach."¹⁸⁵ This aspect will also be the culmination of all our spiritual experiences; as we read in Revelation: "His servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads."¹⁸⁶

This is in no way contradictory with the "tremble before him, all the earth" we read about in earlier psalms.¹⁸⁷ Even in our most intimate relationship with God, there will never be a trace of casualness. It is rather our sense of deep awe before God that will give to our shouting for joy the vibrancy that makes the music live.

In the sequence of our experience the acknowledgment precedes the shouting for joy. Shouting for joy is an emotional reaction; acknowledgment is the result of a rational process. Our intelligence has to be a guide to our emotions, especially in spiritual things. In the practice of daily life, however, this is often turned around. We are more easily convinced by our feelings than by our understanding of the truth. This fact can open the door to all kinds of errors and false teachings.

The psalm demands a two-fold acknowledgment from us in that it uses the two names for God: YHWH and Elohim. Elohim is the creator and YHWH is the redeemer of His people, the One who drew up the contract of our redemption for us. Acknowledgment of God as our creator implies that He has a right to our lives and also that we believe He is willing to take the responsibility for our lives upon Himself, if we entrust ourselves to Him.

Acknowledgment of the fact that God is our shepherd also implies a profound admission of our own weakness. Sheep are, by nature, animals that go astray. This also opens up the New Testament perspective of the Good Shepherd, who gives His life for the sheep. Because of the cross, we belong to Him and we can surrender the reigns of our life to Him. Vs. 3 is the core of the Gospel and the basis for our praise of God. The shepherd Himself became a lamb that was slain in order to save the flock.

The pilgrim who went up to Jerusalem could enter the temple gates, but he could not go any farther than the temple court. We, who have acknowledged Jesus Christ as YHWH Elohim, our creator and

¹⁸⁵ Mark 3:14

¹⁸⁶ Rev. 22:3,4

¹⁸⁷ See Ps. 96:9

redeemer, have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place to have intimate fellowship with the Father.¹⁸⁸ No fellowship on earth can approach this kind of fellowship. The criterion of intimacy between individuals is the measure in which they know each other. God knows us in a special way if we love Him. The Apostle Paul writes: "But the man who loves God is known by God."¹⁸⁹ We are also given the promise that we will know, even as we are known ourselves. Paul says: "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."¹⁹⁰ This is the reason we can begin to understand something of the goodness, love and faithfulness of the Lord while we are still on earth. This psalm is particularly a celebration of God's goodness. The previous psalms emphasized other attributes of God, such as His majesty – in Psalm 93, His vengeance – in Psalm 94, God's rest in which we enter – in Psalm 95, God's superiority over all else – in Psalm 96, His greatness – in Psalm 97 (which is almost identical with Psalm 96), the redemption God brings about – in Psalm 98, and God's holiness – in Psalm 99.

Like all of God's attributes, His goodness and love endure forever. An often-recurring refrain in Israel's songs of praise is "His love endures forever."¹⁹¹ For us, sinful human beings, God's goodness is just as incomprehensible as His love and His holiness. Only when we receive forgiveness of our sins do we understand what it means that God is good.

¹⁸⁸ See Heb. 10:19,20

¹⁸⁹ I Cor. 8:3

¹⁹⁰ I Cor. 13:12

¹⁹¹ See Ps. 136:1

PSALM ONE HUNDRED ONE

Of David. A psalm.

- 1** *I will sing of your love and justice; to you, O LORD, I will sing praise.*
- 2** *I will be careful to lead a blameless life-- when will you come to me? I will walk in my house with blameless heart.*
- 3** *I will set before my eyes no vile thing. The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me.*
- 4** *Men of perverse heart shall be far from me; I will have nothing to do with evil.*
- 5** *Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret, him will I put to silence; whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart, him will I not endure.*
- 6** *My eyes will be on the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me; he whose walk is blameless will minister to me.*
- 7** *No one who practices deceit will dwell in my house; no one who speaks falsely will stand in my presence.*
- 8** *Every morning I will put to silence all the wicked in the land; I will cut off every evildoer from the city of the LORD.*

The Tyndale Commentary supposes that this psalm was written by David at the occasion of his ascension to the throne, or at the beginning of his reign. The psalm expresses his concept of what his reign ought to be.

At the basis of all authority of one human being over another must be love and justice. Also, the private life of a public figure ought to be as irreproachable as is his public image. *The Tyndale Commentary* brings out the fact that David in his life deviated from the good intentions he proclaimed here. But this does in no way diminish the truth which the psalmist expounds that a life of goodness and justice is closely connected to an intimate fellowship with God.

The Hebrew word translated by the NIV with "love" is *cheched* which is rendered in the older versions with "mercy" or "lovingkindness." *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* writes about *cheched*: " 'loving-kindness; steadfast love; grace; mercy; faithfulness; goodness; devotion.' This word is used 240 times in the Old Testament, and is especially frequent in the Psalter. The term is one of the most important in the vocabulary of Old Testament theology and ethics.

The Septuagint nearly always renders *cheched* with *eleos* ('mercy'), and that usage is reflected in the New Testament. Modern translations, in contrast, generally prefer renditions close to the word 'grace.' KJV usually has 'mercy,' although 'loving-kindness'..., 'favor,' and other translations also occur. RSV generally prefers 'steadfast love.' NIV often offers simply 'love.' "

Love and justice are not cold impersonal factors. David sings about them and he identifies them with the person of God. God's attributes and His person are placed next to each other as parallels in vs. 1. When God occupies the central position in a person's life, justice, and love, or compassion for the lot of fellowmen become evident.

The parallels in vs. 1 also suggest that praise is a very practical matter. Singing about justice and love and praising the person of God are one and the same. This psalm is no ode to an abstract concept that has no relation to God's character. We can take this one step further and say that, if love and justice are absent, man has no right to worship God. The Apostle John writes: "If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen."¹⁹²

Vs. 2 states two interesting factors: Paying attention to living a blameless life and a prayer for fellowship with God. "I will be careful" is the NIV's rendering of the Hebrew word *sakal* which means: "to be circumspect or intelligent." This involves an act of the head. To long for God's presence is a reaching out of the heart. Both an analytical study as well as an emotional feeling of safety are needed for a proper, balanced way of life. Some commentaries consider that the phrase "When will you come to me?" does not fit into the context of the psalm. This shows a lack of understanding of what is essential for the leading of a blameless life. How can one live blamelessly without realizing his own failure?

Then there is the understanding that holiness begins at home. "No king is great to his own valet." The problem is that our life at home is not blameless. At the place where we can be ourselves, it turns out

¹⁹² I John 4:20

that there is something wrong with “self.” Corruption and dishonesty begin at home. If the Lord doesn’t come and transform us inside out, our situation is hopeless before we begin. It stinks in our closet. We need a miracle for us to become “to God the aroma of Christ.”¹⁹³ But even after this has taken place we have to walk cautiously. The devil often whispers unworthy thoughts in our ears and projects dirty images on the screen of our mind. Job said: “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.”¹⁹⁴ Those words contain the confession that Job was not immune to sexual temptations. We have to treat ourselves with severity if, on the basis of our reconciliation in Christ, we will only look at those things God wants us to see. Our eyes and our thoughts have to be subjected to the censorship of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul wrote: “We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”¹⁹⁵ Either we do what David said he did: “I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken,”¹⁹⁶ or we give Satan a free reign in our lives.

Vs. 4 sounds so easy: “Men of perverse heart shall be far from me; I will have nothing to do with evil,” but it is here that things begin to go wrong. We assume that the “perverse heart” which David mentions represents his own inner life, not that of someone else. It is easy to say: “I will have nothing to do with evil.” A closer look reveals that this is not true. The devil keeps his foot in the door because there is always a voice from the inside that answers his knock. Our hearts turn out to be a willing sounding board for Satan. Some charismatic brethren proclaim that the devil is the only source of sin in our lives, as if there would be no sinful nature within us that provide rich soil for evil. This is not true. God has to deliver us from self. The new birth is the first step on the road to sanctification. We have to pursue holiness. Victory begins when we realize that we cannot do this alone.

David’s prayer: “When will you come to me?” is the theme that rules these verses. Unless there is a major cleanup at home, we will not be able to take a stand against the conspiracies that are plotted around us. Man is more dangerous to man than wild animals are. Sometimes we destroy each other through violence but more often through slander and intrigue. The reason for this is our proud heart. Pride is the summit of self-love and the opposite of brotherly love. Love goes together with humility. David recognizes this by mentioning slander and pride in the same breath.

Vs. 6 demonstrates the truth that man’s wisdom is related to the quality of his advisors. And quality is not merely a matter of intelligence. At this point also, David has failed miserably at home. People such as Joab and Ahithophel were scoundrels. It takes wisdom to recognize wisdom and nobility to know nobility. The principle David expounds in vs. 6 is a shadow of the functioning of the church of Jesus Christ. This must be the way we will reign with Christ. In the light of God’s infinite wisdom and omniscience it seems redundant that we would be appointed to surround our Lord with our counsel. But what else can be meant here? Proverbs says: “For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure.”¹⁹⁷ Even on the lower level on which most of us live (after all, not many of us are in a position of power) it is important with whom we surround ourselves and who influences our thinking.

Vs. 8 reads in the NIV: “Every morning I will put to silence all the wicked in the land; I will cut off every evildoer from the city of the LORD.” The Interlinear Bible says literally: “Early (or in the morning) I will destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off from the city of the Lord all wicked doers.” TLB gives the following paraphrase: “My daily task will be to ferret out criminals and free the city of God from their grip.” My teacher of Systematic Theology at the Brussels Bible Institute believed that this verse referred to the Millennium, and that under Christ’s reign there would daily be an execution of all sinners. We used to poke fun at him. I cannot see how this verse would fit in the conditions of Christ’s Millennium. The Hebrew word translated with “cut off” is *karath* which, according to *Strong’s Definitions* refers “specifically, to covenant (i.e. make an alliance or bargain, originally by cutting flesh and passing between the pieces).” In the context of David’s psalm, the thought is probably that the king wanted application of justice to be prompt and efficient.

We could see this verse also as a prophecy about the New Jerusalem, about which the Apostle John writes: “Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book

¹⁹³ II Cor. 2:15

¹⁹⁴ Job 31:1

¹⁹⁵ II Cor. 10:5

¹⁹⁶ Ps. 16:8

¹⁹⁷ Prov. 11:14

of life.”¹⁹⁸ Implicit in this verse is the holiness of the city of God, the place where God dwells, that is the church, and even our own bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit.

The psalm presents the oath the king pronounces at the moment of his ascension of the throne. There is a connection between the preceding psalms that speak about God as the ruling king and this one that speaks about man as king. The order in which the psalms are placed is an acknowledgment of the fact that God is the real king and that man who reigns by the grace of God is under obligation to conform his reign to the character of God. This is the essence of this oath of office.

In closing, this psalm also emphasizes the hopelessness of man in his sinful condition. David's oath turned out to be a perjury in the practice of his life. The psalm strengthens the longing for the king who is blameless: our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁹⁸ Rev. 21:15, 27

PSALM ONE HUNDRED TWO

A prayer of an afflicted man. When he is faint and pours out his lament
before the LORD.

- 1 *Hear my prayer, O LORD; let my cry for help come to you.*
- 2 *Do not hide your face from me when I am in distress. Turn your ear to me; when I call, answer me quickly.*
- 3 *For my days vanish like smoke; my bones burn like glowing embers.*
- 4 *My heart is blighted and withered like grass; I forget to eat my food.*
- 5 *Because of my loud groaning I am reduced to skin and bones.*
- 6 *I am like a desert owl, like an owl among the ruins.*
- 7 *I lie awake; I have become like a bird alone on a roof.*
- 8 *All day long my enemies taunt me; those who rail against me use my name as a curse.*
- 9 *For I eat ashes as my food and mingle my drink with tears*
- 10 *because of your great wrath, for you have taken me up and thrown me aside.*
- 11 *My days are like the evening shadow;*
I wither away like grass.
- 12 *But you, O LORD, sit enthroned forever; your renown endures through all generations.*
- 13 *You will arise and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to show favor to her; the appointed time has come.*
- 14 *For her stones are dear to your servants; her very dust moves them to pity.*
- 15 *The nations will fear the name of the LORD, all the kings of the earth will revere your glory.*
- 16 *For the LORD will rebuild Zion and appear in his glory.*
- 17 *He will respond to the prayer of the destitute; he will not despise their plea.*
- 18 *Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the LORD:*
- 19 *“The LORD looked down from his sanctuary on high, from heaven he viewed the earth,*
- 20 *to hear the groans of the prisoners and release those condemned to death.”*
- 21 *So the name of the LORD will be declared in Zion and his praise in Jerusalem*
- 22 *when the peoples and the kingdoms assemble to worship the LORD.*
- 23 *In the course of my life he broke my strength; he cut short my days.*
- 24 *So I said: “Do not take me away, O my God, in the midst of my days; your years go on through all generations.*
- 25 *In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.*
- 26 *They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded.*
- 27 *But you remain the same, and your years will never end.*
- 28 *The children of your servants will live in your presence; their descendants will be established before you.”*

This psalm is attributed to no one in particular. It is a prayer, a complaint of a man who is at the point of collapse. No specific time is given to help us place the psalm against a historic background. George Knight in his *Commentary on the Psalms*, speaks about a Babylonian captivity probably because of the stones and dust mentioned in vs. 14. Commentators also extensively debate the question whether the psalm speaks about a personal or a collective complaint. We will begin by leaving those questions untouched for the moment.

The psalmist is obviously at the end of his rope. He sees no help on the horizontal level and, therefore, he turns to the Lord. This is good; such moments are often the best of a man's life. Writing about the blitz of London, one of the darkest moments during World War II, Winston Churchill called his book *Their Finest Hour*. This may be the key to understanding the mystery of suffering.

The verses 1 and 2 can be given the title “help!” Because the circumstances are kept vague and general, we can say that the emphasis is more upon the principle than upon the application. The Apostle Paul sums this up in the words: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”¹⁹⁹ This is

¹⁹⁹ Rom. 10:13

what the psalmist does in these opening verses. He calls on the Name of the Lord for help because all human avenues have been exhausted. This is what determines the intensity of our calling. There is a calling upon God as one of many possibilities to receive help, with the underlying thought that we will try something else if His help doesn't come forth. The calling upon the Lord in this psalm is unique because all other possibilities have been exhausted. The idea that God would in any way hide Himself or withdraw is an illusion, like the illusion that the sun orbits the earth. This is the way we experience it, but it is not the way it is in reality.

As we said before, no indication is given for the cause of the outcry of the psalmist. The expression: "In the day that I call" (NKJV), sounds like a preparation for events to come. It is as if the psalmist wants to say that he is all right for the time being, but he isn't sure that he will be able in the future to have enough faith to keep standing. This sounds contradictory, for in the beginning we said that the psalmist was about to collapse. The phrase "in the day" is probably a poetical expression for the present. The NIV simply reads: "When I call." The symptoms mentioned in vs. 3 are all in the present tense.

Why is it that sickness often weakens our sense of God's presence? When our bones ache, we feel that God hides His face from us. We measure the sense of God's presence with the yardstick of our fitness and the amount of energy we feel we have. Faith is based upon the objective fact of God's omnipresence. The Biblical principle is that God's "power is made perfect in weakness."²⁰⁰

If we take the psalmist's negative utterances in the first few verses and turn them around, we arrive at a positive confirmation of God's attitude toward our prayers. He does hear us when we call. He pays full attention to our cry for help. He turns His ear to us, as if His listening intensifies when He hears us call.

In the verses 3-11, the psalmist gives the reasons for his complaint. Most of them are physical afflictions but there are also emotional problems such as loneliness and the enemies who are after the poet's life. The images that symbolize the writer's condition most clearly are fire, smoke, and embers. Fire is usually a positive picture used to describe the inner life of a person but here the intention of the psalmist is, obviously, negative. The image the author projects is rather of a "burn-out" than of a flamboyant person. The symptoms are smoke and the painful experience of burning up. He is inwardly so dry that the fire has no problem consuming him. This has no relationship with a burnt offering that goes up in flames in a meaningful way to the glory of God. This is senseless destruction. It is a fire that destroys man.

The images of the birds: the desert owl (or pelican), the owl among the ruins, and the bird (or person) on the roof are projections of the loneliness of the psalmist. Man needs social intercourse with fellow human beings. God did not create isolated individuals; He made one man and out of this one person the whole human race was built. This clearly demonstrates the mutual dependence of all of humanity. How this kind of fellowship would have developed if man had not severed the bond with God, we can only guess. How it is in practice, we can observe daily with our own eyes. Man not only is a stranger to God and his neighbor but even to himself.

The psalmist seems to go, however, beyond a general condition of estrangement. There are, obviously, specific reasons that are not mentioned for his feeling of isolation. The memory of times past of fellowship with God makes the separation painful and more deeply felt. In this depth of being forsaken is a shadow of the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ. Vs. 8 indicates that there is not only a lack of sympathy and fellowship with others but a demonstration of hatred and mockery. Man despises and humiliates his fellowmen.

It is at this deepest point when the psalmist eats ashes for food and mingles his drink with tears that his eyes are opened and he catches a glimpse of God. The fact of God's eternity has quite a different effect upon man here than in Psalm 90. There God's eternity accentuates man's transience, here God's eternity lifts man out of his evanescence. God's eternity is a warranty for man's eternal existence. God's name, that is His character, His eternal being, is enthroned from generation to generation. Man may be born and die, but he who does the will of God lives forever. God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is not a God of the dead, as Jesus said, but of the living.²⁰¹

Verses 13 and 14 would indeed fit well in the framework of the return from captivity. There must have been others besides Daniel who were aware of the fact that God would bring about a change in Israel's condition after seventy years. There is even a possibility that Daniel may have written this psalm

²⁰⁰ See II Cor. 12:9

²⁰¹ See Matt. 22:32

himself during the time he prayed and fasted,²⁰² but that is, of course, pure speculation. It is also possible that the stones and dust are an image of the period when the service of YHWH was neglected and the temple had become dilapidated, as at the time Josiah ascended the throne.

These verses teach us that a spiritual revival is not the result of human initiative only. It always begins with God's compassion. The Holy Spirit has to work in man's heart to awaken interest and hunger. God determines the time. This thought raises all kinds of questions. Does this mean that man is passive and cannot deploy any initiative? This goes against the grain of our human nature! God did not create us like that. If man uses waiting upon the Lord as an excuse for a lack of activity, he falls under the wrath of God. Hagg 1:2-4 But there is also a waiting upon the Lord that is in harmony with the expectation of God's initiative. That is the kind of waiting with which we have to occupy ourselves.

The stanza of the verses 12-22 fits very well in Haggai's prophecy: " 'I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty. 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty. 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the LORD Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty."²⁰³

Zechariah says the same: "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come, and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, ' 'Let us go at once to entreat the LORD and seek the LORD Almighty. I myself am going.' ' And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the LORD Almighty and to entreat him.' This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.' "²⁰⁴

The central thought is that God's revelation of Himself in Jerusalem and in Jesus Christ will mean salvation for the whole world. Man is involved in this revelation. People to whom "her stones are dear" and who are moved to pity by "her very dust" are those who are building a spiritual house and who are themselves used as living stones.²⁰⁵ God's revelation does not go outside those who have insight in the functioning of the body of Christ. Those stones now lie scattered. This dust witnesses against us.

The Tyndale Commentary refers, in connection with this, to Isaiah's beautiful prophecy in the chapters 60-62. The prophecy about the rubble and the coming of the nations that are drawn by God's glory is, undoubtedly, applicable to our time. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says that the believers of the Old Testament did not receive the promise because "God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."²⁰⁶

Peter even goes further by saying: "Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things."²⁰⁷

Some of these thoughts are also present in this psalm. The emphasis is on the future when God's glory will again appear in Zion. The fullness of time is the time of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is what the Apostle Paul calls it. In Galatians we read: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law...."²⁰⁸ The glory of the Lord did indeed fill the house of the Lord when Jesus entered the temple and healed the lame and blind who came to Him.²⁰⁹ That was "the day the Lord has made." The fullness of time will arrive again when the Lamb will stand on Mount Zion, as John saw Him in Revelation.²¹⁰ Then the prayer of this destitute, as vs. 17 calls him, will be heard.

It sounds strange that the psalmist says that God's intervention should be written down for future generations, as if there is a danger that they, for whom this intervention is meant to be, would forget.

²⁰² See Dan. ch. 9

²⁰³ Hagg. 2:7-9

²⁰⁴ Zech. 8:20-23

²⁰⁵ See I Pet. 2:5

²⁰⁶ Heb. 11:40

²⁰⁷ I Pet. 1:10-12

²⁰⁸ Gal. 4:4

²⁰⁹ See Matt. 21:12-17

²¹⁰ See Rev. 14:1

Evidently, the danger is not imaginary. On the one hand, God's hand is not always visible to man and, on the other hand, man tends to be forgetful. Our redemption is based on a series of facts consisting of the birth, the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus. The discovery of those facts and of their significance for us often brings about a dramatic change in our lives. This conscious awareness, however, tends to become vague as time goes and we have a need to be brought back to the basics over and over again. Our guide is the written Word. "A people not yet created may praise the LORD" if they hold to the Bible in which the facts of salvation are recorded.

The future generation is called "a people not yet created." If it this would refer to natural descendants, the term would be awkward. "Created" implies that there is new life that does not come forth from the old. What is meant is, obviously, a new birth, not merely a being born. These are people who are in Christ Jesus and who are consequently called "a new creation." The Apostle Paul says: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."²¹¹ The important point is that God is being praised. Everything else, God's intervention and man's salvation, is subjected to this point. The primary goal is God's praise. The first and foremost task of the church is praise. The fact that God does perform miracles of redemption and of healing makes it easier for man to burst out in shouts of joy but the miracles are not the important part.

Looking down from heaven, God saw that man was imprisoned on earth and that he was doomed to die, and God intervened. God said to Moses: "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey--the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites."²¹² God says the same to us in Jesus Christ, who said: "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."²¹³ Man has, however, taken his condition lightly, not realizing that, not only, is he enslaved but also condemned to death. We are too blind to see this.

God's revelation in Zion will, ultimately, mean the salvation of the world.

It seems completely contradictory that, after making these positive statements about God's revelation, the psalmist falls back into the complaint with which the psalm opened. Yet, the death mentioned in the verses 23 and 24 is an essential part of God's revelation. This too may be seen as a prophecy about the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. His days were cut short, and He died as a young man in order to open the gate of the revelation of God's glory.

That the following verses are a prophecy about Christ is clear from the fact that they are quoted in Hebrews: "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end."²¹⁴ These words are used by the author of the Hebrew Epistle as proof of Christ's divinity. The revelation of God's glory consists of both the death and the life of the Messiah. It is the eternal, immutable God who became man and who poured out His life in death in order to free us from our sin.

This answers the question as to whether this psalm is a personal complaint or a description of the condition of the people as a whole. God identifies Himself in Jesus Christ with the whole of the fallen human race. In the words of Isaiah: "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows."²¹⁵ It is the God whose years will never end whose strength was broken and whose days were cut short.

In this manner the Holy Spirit answers every man who is sick and lonely and who cannot sleep at night. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin."²¹⁶ He is the eternal God, creator of heaven and earth. This guarantees that "the children of your servants will live in your presence; their descendants will be established before you." Because He became like us, we will be like Him.

²¹¹ II Cor. 5:17 (NKJV)

²¹² Ex. 3:7-8

²¹³ John 8:34-36

²¹⁴ Heb. 1:10-12

²¹⁵ Isa. 53:4

²¹⁶ Heb. 4:15

PSALM ONE HUNDRED THREE

Of David.

- 1 Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.**
- 2 Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits--**
- 3 who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,**
- 4 who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion,**
- 5 who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.**
- 6 The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.**
- 7 He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel:**
- 8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.**
- 9 He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever;**
- 10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.**
- 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;**
- 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.**
- 13 As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;**
- 14 for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.**
- 15 As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field;**
- 16 the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.**
- 17 But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children--**
- 18 with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.**
- 19 The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.**
- 20 Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word.**
- 21 Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will.**
- 22 Praise the LORD, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the LORD, O my soul.**

This psalm was the life-psalm of the person who was instrumental in bringing me to the Lord. It is a song of praise, a song of forgiveness, healing, and renewal. One Dutch translation uses the words "Praise the Lord for His grace" as a subscript.

Praise never comes naturally for man. Although the ultimate purpose of creation is that God would be praised, we, as human beings, have to push ourselves into doing this. Even in the lives of the best Christians, praise is rarely abundant. This is the reason David exhorts himself to praise. "Praise the LORD, O my soul" is more a wake-up call to reality than an actual act of worship. In this respect this psalm differs from the following ones. This difference shows implicitly how much damage sin has caused. We have to call ourselves back from a world of unreality to a conscious reality in which we can realize who God is. In more than one respect we "know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord."²¹⁷ In this way our actual acts of praise are usually preceded by a mobilization of our senses, of our mind, and of our sense of reality.

Because of the above, I believe that David more addresses himself than God in these verses. All this proves man's dichotomy as a result of sin. We harbor more than one nature in ourselves. There is no real inner harmony within us. Man has become a stranger to himself because of sin. One part of us wants to worship God and another part puts up resistance. Real worship is usually preceded by inner victory over ourselves. Without the help of the Holy Spirit we would never make it.

David calls upon his soul and upon his memory to praise the Lord. *The Word Biblical Commentary* translates vs. 1 with: "Bless Yahweh, I tell myself." Although poetically it is less attractive, that is a good rendering of David's thought. We need inner harmony in order to praise God. It requires an act of the will as well as an act of the mind. "Forget not..." Our memory is a wonderful organ. It is probably the most extraordinary and complex gift with which God endowed us. Sometimes it causes us trouble when we grow older. An elderly lady we knew called her memory "the thing I forget with." One of the intriguing features is that we can forget certain things because we want to forget. We can manipulate our memory, especially when certain events are too painful to remember. But why we would forget God's benefits to us is another question.

²¹⁷ See II Cor. 5:6

As far as benefits done to our person is concerned, we may believe that it is inconvenient to show gratitude, because it would hinder our lifestyle. In that case sin pushes certain things away in a corner of our mind so that we would not have to make drastic changes in our lives.

Other benefits are historical, well documented facts which we have to recall in order to keep our fellowship with God healthy. This makes reading of the Biblical record of such vital importance to us. It is much harder to muddle the facts of salvation than certain personal blessings, although some theologians are very clever in doing even that.

Among all the factors that influence our memory, our will is the most important one. Submission of our will to the will of God will stimulate our memory considerably. It will be much easier for us to praise the Lord when we have just tasted God's rich blessings and when heaven is still open above us. Sometimes, however, we will have to reach back into the past in order to be able to worship when heaven is like brass. People with good memories make better worshippers.

What are those benefits we should not forget? David mentions six categories in which all our experiences can be fitted: 1. Pardon, 2. Healing, 3. Redemption from death, 4. Crowning, 5. Fulfillment, 6. Renewal. Each of these is worth extensive study.

1. Pardon involves the removal of all iniquity. The Hebrew word translated here with "sin" is *avon* which means both a natural tendency to evil as well as acts of transgression. What God does for us brings about an inward change that straightens out our tendency to deviate toward evil. It consists of a structural cleansing. The fact that this does not occur instantaneously and completely does not diminish its truth.

2. *The Tyndale Commentary* says about the healing of all our diseases: "For all the similarity of these two phrases, there is a difference between God's handling of *iniquity* and of *diseases*, which was made plain in David's own case when he repented of his sin with Bathsheba. Forgiveness was immediate; but healing was denied, in spite of seven days of prayer and fasting (2 Sam. 12:13-23). If relationship with God is paramount, this makes good sense, for sin destroys it, while suffering may deepen it (Heb. 5:8; 12:11)." It remains true, however, that deep below the surface, forgiveness and healing are closely related. The lesson of this verse is that God's atonement affects man as a whole: spirit, soul, and body.

3. Redemption from death is more than a parallel with the healing of physical ailments. It pertains to the resurrection, to redemption from "the second death" as John calls it in Revelation.²¹⁸ God gives us eternal life. The fact that David speaks about this during his life on earth proves that this life exists on both sides of the grave.

4. It is difficult to determine where the accent should be placed in vs. 4, on the rehabilitation, the crowning, the love, or the compassion. God's goodness is not given to us as an alms which humiliates but as a crown that elevates us. Gifts we bestow upon each other as human beings often make beggars out of us. What God gives to us makes us kings. Originally, we were created as kings. Sin produced poverty. But in God's rehabilitation we receive much more than a restoration of the original condition such as Adam enjoyed. The Hebrew words translated with "love and compassion" are *chesed* and *raham*. *Chesed* is the word for God's covenant love, often rendered in the KJV with "loving-kindness." *Raham* refers to the womb, it is the tender love an expectant mother has for her unborn child. God's compassion caresses us. We could say that the words *chesed* and *raham* are expressions of the masculine and feminine form of God's love for us.

5. "Satisfy" refers to the soul. This does not exclude other forms of satisfaction but it is of vital importance to our sense of well-being that we experience inner peace and fulfillment. We know that riches and honor do not cause happiness. Some poor people lead fulfilled lives. Fulfillment is only found in fellowship with God. The RSV reads: "Who satisfies you with good as long as you live." He not merely fills our lives with good things, as the NIV renders it, but with "good" that is with Himself. The Hebrew does not have the word "things" in its text.

6. This sense of fulfillment also has its effect upon our physical condition, which is expressed in the words: "So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." Spiritual and emotional health bring about a renewal of physical energy. G. B. Shaw's dictum: "Youth is a wonderful thing. Too bad it is wasted on young people" does not always apply. In the beautiful words of Isaiah: "But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."²¹⁹ Psalm One uses the picture of a tree: "He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."²²⁰

²¹⁸ See Rev. 20:14,15

²¹⁹ Isa. 40:31

²²⁰ Ps. 1:3

Having said these things, it seems strange when we look back at the first stanza that David had to arouse himself to praise the Lord. This proves how abnormal sin has made us. We carry the proofs of our redemption in us and yet praise comes with difficulty. How is that possible?

The second stanza, verses 6-18, gives us a historical and topical listing of what is called “benefits” in vs. 2. The first reference is to the exodus. “All the oppressed” speaks of Israel’s condition in Egypt. What God did for Israel remains one of the great miracles of world history. Israel’s mass departure from Egypt and her journey through the desert can only be explained if we recognize God’s supernatural intervention. All that is understood in the Bible under redemption (deliverance from slavery and fear, leading into fellowship with God, rehabilitation of human dignity, victory over evil) can be found in this exodus. All this is contained in the word “righteousness.” God demonstrated His righteousness both to Pharaoh and to Israel.

The German preacher Herman Zaiss explains the difference between “He made known his ways to Moses,” and “his deeds to the people of Israel” by saying that Israel only saw what God did but Moses was given insight into the way God did it and the reason for it. Most of the Israelites understood very little of what happened to them in the exodus. Moses entered into an intimate fellowship with God which gave to his whole life a supernatural hue. The only things we read about Israel as a whole is that they complained against God. Both Moses and Israel saw the same divine deeds but their reaction was completely opposite. It is true that the circumstances did not appear in a very rosy light. The thirst at Massah and Meribah and the war with Amalek were painful experiences. But on the other side of the balance were the unmistakable signs of God such as the Tenth Plague in Egypt and the drowning of the whole Egyptian army. They knew that it was God who had led them into the desert. Man only lives in the present or in the past when he thinks it is convenient for him. Israel’s redemption in the past could have transformed the hardships of the present. But they chose to forget what happened to them in the past and concentrate on the misery of the present day. It ought to be our life-goal to “know” the ways of the Lord.

This whole stanza gains in depth when we place it against the background of the wilderness journey. Vs. 8, “The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love” is a literal quote from the book of Exodus when God passed in front of Moses and proclaimed to him. The sins and iniquities also take on a more solid form when we see them as a reference to Israel’s rebellion in the desert. It is always dangerous to speak about sin and iniquity in vague terms. God’s wrath is always directed toward concrete incidents.

It was at one of the lowest points during the desert crossing, when Israel was at Mount Sinai where God revealed Himself to them and the people had produced the Golden Calf, that Moses asked to see God’s glory. We read in Exodus: “Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ‘The LORD (YHWH), the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God (Elohim), slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.’”²²¹ The words “Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished” refer to the death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is typical for this psalm that, of all the experiences during the journey through the wilderness, the one that is chosen is the glorious encounter between God and Moses. The incident was one of the summits in the Old Testament. All the factors that we come upon in our spiritual lives are present here: the law as symbol of our obedience to the will of God, the iniquity of the people, the glory of God’s presence and forgiveness. “Who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases....”

We have to pause here to look at this forgiveness and the cessation of God’s wrath. Just as the exodus from Egypt symbolizes all of redemption, so this forgiveness at Mount Sinai stands for all forgiveness of sin in the life of a Christian. The insult to God in the making of the Golden Calf was immense. We have to understand that God’s wrath is not a matter of God becoming arbitrarily angry but that it is a constant reaction against evil. The Apostle Paul writes in his Epistle to the Romans: “The wrath of God is being revealed (that is constantly, continuously) from heaven....”²²² If David says that God will not always accuse and not harbor His anger forever, it does not mean that one of His divine attributes has disappeared. For God’s anger is just as much one of His attributes as are His love and righteousness. The Exodus record says: “He does not leave the guilty unpunished.” The word “the guilty” is provided in most

²²¹ Ex. 34:5-7

²²² Rom. 1:18

versions, but it is not in the Hebrew text. The only reason for the cessation of God's anger is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. If it weren't for the cross of Christ, God would be our adversary of whom the writer of the Hebrew Epistle says: "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."²²³ On Mount Sinai, we see how deep forgiveness goes. There is the broken law, the glory of God, God's wrath, there is a man who is willing to be blotted out of God's book and give his life to save others,²²⁴ and there is forgiveness.

The greatest sin man ever committed was the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Nothing has ever surpassed this rejection of God's glory. We see some of the indignation about this reflected in the parable of the tenants of the vineyard. The reaction of the audience upon the hearing of the story was: "He [God] will bring those wretches to a wretched end,... and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."²²⁵ But that is not what the Lord Himself says. God's answer is: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?"²²⁶

God doesn't give us tit for tat. God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ is unlimited and infinite. That is why our rejection of this pardon is so terrible. The writer to the Hebrews makes this clear when he says: "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' and again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."²²⁷

If, however, we confess our sin, God not only pardons us but He removes our guilt in an infinite manner. From the earth's surface to the heavens is a tremendous distance and the stretch from East to West is immeasurable. If David had used the words "North to South," he would have spoken about a certain distance, which is measurable in miles, but East and West are infinities.

God's love reveals itself nowhere so clearly as in the way in which He forgives our sins. When I met the Lord for the first time in my life and became aware of my sinful condition, I clearly understood Him to say: "I don't want to talk about that anymore." Our reaction upon the murder of the Son is that the worst of deaths is not good enough for the perpetrators. But God not only offers us His pardon but also complete rehabilitation and more. David puts it rather euphemistically: "He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities."

God's "love" is called "great" and is compared to the infiniteness of the universe. "Love" is the translation of the Hebrew word *chesed*, which is rendered elsewhere with "mercy" or "lovingkindness," and the Hebrew word translated with "great", is *gabar* which literally means "to be strong." When we try to analyze God's attributes, we engage in something that is merely theoretical. In reality, God's attributes cannot be studied independently or separately. God is, at the same time, eternal, and almighty, and compassionate. All the divine attributes form one organic whole. Our being forgiven is the result of an encounter with the totality of God's being. We saw already in vs. 4 that God's goodness is revealed to us in its masculine and feminine form. God's love for us is expressed in terms of earthly relationships, both as fatherly and motherly love. *Chesed* refers to the fatherly aspect of this love. It is the strong, masculine love that protects us and that guarantees our safety. Our heavenly Father is stronger than anyone else. Vs. 11 tells us that God's lovingkindness is strong.

It is not by accident that David uses the image of a father. "As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him." This compassion is not only an expression of God's emotions toward us but it is practical and rehabilitating. It comes to us in the form of a covenant that is legal and binding. God draws up a contract with us. This implies that God treats us as His equals. We often find it difficult to determine what is the image and what is the reality. When David says: "As a father..." he suggests that the reality is an earthly father and that God resembles him. In the New Testament, Jesus turns the comparison around by calling God "the Father." The term is first used by John

²²³ Heb. 10:31

²²⁴ See Ex. 32:32

²²⁵ Matt. 21:41

²²⁶ Matt. 21:42

²²⁷ Heb. 10:26-31

in the prologue of his Gospel: “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known,”²²⁸ and by Jesus Himself in Matthew’s Gospel where He says: “All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”²²⁹ In His conversation with the Samaritan women we read: “Jesus declared, ‘Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.’”²³⁰

In vs. 14, we find a reference to the fall. It is true that God formed man from the dust of the earth but man was also created in God’s image and likeness with all the glory that this includes. The words: “dust you are and to dust you will return”²³¹ were pronounced after the fall when God’s image in man was destroyed. God did not create us as dust and with the tendency to go astray. David’s words indicate that God is very much aware of how much damage sin has caused. How deeply aware He is, becomes clear in the New Testament. It was that awareness that prompted the Incarnation. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews expresses it as follows: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-yet was without sin.”²³² We don’t have to be embarrassed about our weaknesses before God; He knows them by experience. In the words of Isaiah: “Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows.”²³³

This psalm does not say what is the result of God’s remembering that we are dust, or how we can overcome our weaknesses. But the tone of the psalm suggests that there is victory both for our moral weaknesses as well as for our physical transient condition. After all, what help would it be for us that the LORD’s love is with those who fear him from everlasting to everlasting, if we ourselves are merely ephemeral. This makes the words Jesus addressed to the Sadducees so important to us: “Have you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”²³⁴ The fact that God connects His Name with ours is a warranty of our immortality. On earth we may be as a flower of the field but in heaven we are pillars in God’s temple that is indestructible and eternal.²³⁵

We find the image of the fading flower three times in Scriptures. In Isaiah we read: “A voice says, ‘Cry out.’ And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’ ‘All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them.’ Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.”²³⁶ And Peter writes: “For, ‘All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.’ And this is the word that was preached to you.”²³⁷ In this psalm God’s love and righteousness are mentioned as the eternal factors as opposed to man’s mortality. Isaiah places God’s eternal Word over against man’s transience. With Peter it is the Gospel. All three are, of course, identical.

The word that is important in this balance between God’s immutability and man’s evanescence is “fear.” We find this word three times in this psalm: in vs. 11– “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him,” in vs. 13– “As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him,” and in vs. 17– “But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD’s love is with those who fear him.” Vs. 18 paraphrases the concept of the fear of the Lord as keeping His covenant and remembering to obey His precepts. The fear of the Lord is the awe that is the result of the realization of who the God is we are dealing with. The fruit of this sense of reality is obedience. Our mortality is the result of disobedience. Our immortality was brought about by the obedience

²²⁸ John 1:18

²²⁹ Matt. 11:27

²³⁰ John 4:21

²³¹ Gen. 3:19

²³² Heb. 4:15

²³³ Isa. 53:4

²³⁴ Matt. 22:31,32

²³⁵ See Rev. 3:12

²³⁶ Isa. 40:6-8

²³⁷ I Peter 1:24,25

of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul says: “For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”²³⁸

This all has practical consequences for our personal life. Without the keeping of God’s covenant and the remembering to obey His precepts, none of the above will have any value for us. This is best expressed by the Apostle John in the words: “The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”²³⁹ All of this demonstrates how important it is for us to know God. This stanza opens with the redemption as illustrated in the exodus from Egypt; following this, David mentions the intimacy between God and Moses, and he ends with eternity, our eternity.

In the last verses the psalmist opens all the stops. Heaven and earth join together in a magnificent, multi-voiced choir which culminates in one single voice that sings the same words as in the opening: “Praise the LORD, O my soul.” This again is more an exhortation than a praise. David sees God enthroned upon the throne of the universe. How much more glorious is this vision than the personal experiences which he mentioned before! Forgiveness and healing on a personal level are, of course, important and the redemption of Israel from Egypt’s slavery is a great event. But what is all of this in comparison with “before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne?”²⁴⁰ Everything else stands in the shadow of this vision, and everything owes it meaning to this. God reigns over all. That is the basis and content of all praise, also for us who live, in the words of C. S. Lewis, on “A Silent Planet.”

This psalm is a call to break the silence and to blend our voices with the shouts of joy that fill the universe. We live in a world that lies under the rule of the Evil One. He wants to forbid us to praise God. David’s psalm is a shout of rebellion against the rule of darkness. David reaches out to the redemption that is coming.

The relationship between man and the angels is rather complicated. In the order of creation, man stands above the angels. We conclude this from what the writer to the Hebrews says: “To which of the angels did God ever say, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet’? Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?”²⁴¹ And: “It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. But there is a place where someone has testified: ‘What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?’”²⁴² When man sinned he fell from his high position to a level that was lower than that of the angels. This is the reason we now look up to angels and stand in awe of them. Angels, as purely spiritual beings, probably have gifts and abilities that we never possessed. But the opposite is also true. One thing is obvious: angels have access to God which we do not have at this moment. They are God’s servants who do His will. They derive their value from the fact that they stand before God and do His bidding. The angel Gabriel said to Zacharias: “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.”²⁴³ Angels are, obviously, moral creatures who, like man, have the ability to choose between good and evil. The four archangels, which Isaiah called “Seraphs” and which John describes in greater detail in Revelation,²⁴⁴ are highly intelligent beings with a multi-dimensional consciousness. They are on duty day and night, praising God incessantly with their free will, and with the involvement of their whole personality. The Apostle John calls them “living beings” with the emphasis upon *living*. We don’t know if David ever had a vision of the throne of God as Isaiah, Ezekiel, and John had, but he was, obviously, aware of the existence of archangels as God’s “mighty ones who do his bidding.”

The angel who spoke with Daniel²⁴⁵ never gave his own name but he mentioned another angel called Michael. John also mentions Michael’s name in Revelation: “And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back.”²⁴⁶ We know Gabriel from Luke’s Gospel.²⁴⁷ We further know from David’s psalm about God’s angels, the “mighty ones who do

²³⁸ Rom. 5:19

²³⁹ I John 2:17

²⁴⁰ Rev. 4:2,3

²⁴¹ Heb. 1:13,14

²⁴² Heb. 2:5,6

²⁴³ Luke 1:19

²⁴⁴ See Isa. 6:1 and Rev. 4:6-8

²⁴⁵ See Dan. 10:4-21

²⁴⁶ Rev. 12:7

²⁴⁷ See Luke 1:19,20,26

his bidding, who obey his word,” and “All his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will.” The Apostle Paul distinguishes groups of angels which he calls: “thrones or powers or rulers or authorities.”²⁴⁸

The point of it all is that David wants these awesome creatures to praise God. But they do this already. It is strange to see how David projects his frustration as a human being upon these heavenly beings. Or, maybe, he wanted to emphasize the company in which he found himself in order to stimulate his own soul and to open his mouth to praise the Lord.

“All His works!” That is all of creation, including the flowers, the trees, the animals, the clouds, the sun, moon, the stars and the planets, the rocks, and the water, and the wind. The Seraphs sang: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty, the whole earth is full of his glory.”²⁴⁹ All of creation already proclaims God’s glory, except the human soul. We, who have willfully separated ourselves from God, have become mute. Death has taken over and has quieted our voices. If we can exhort ourselves to praise God again, we experience nothing less than a resurrection from the dead. It means that we have placed ourselves anew under God’s rule. Our praise is always linked to the prayer: “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Col. 1:16

²⁴⁹ Isa. 6:3

²⁵⁰ Matt. 6:10

PSALM ONE HUNDRED FOUR

1 Praise the LORD, O my soul.
O LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty.
2 He wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent
3 and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides
on the wings of the wind.
4 He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants.
5 He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved.
6 You covered it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains.
7 But at your rebuke the waters fled, at the sound of your thunder they took to flight;
8 they flowed over the mountains, they went down into the valleys, to the place you assigned for them.
9 You set a boundary they cannot cross; never again will they cover the earth.
10 He makes springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains.
11 They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst.
12 The birds of the air nest by the waters; they sing among the branches.
13 He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the earth is satisfied by the fruit of his work.
14 He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate--bringing forth food from the
earth:
15 wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart.
16 The trees of the LORD are well watered, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
17 There the birds make their nests; the stork has its home in the pine trees.
18 The high mountains belong to the wild goats; the crags are a refuge for the coney.
19 The moon marks off the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down.
20 You bring darkness, it becomes night, and all the beasts of the forest prowl.
21 The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God.
22 The sun rises, and they steal away ;they return and lie down in their dens.
23 Then man goes out to his work, to his labor until evening.
24 How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your
creatures.
25 There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number--living things both large
and small.
26 There the ships go to and fro, and the leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.
27 These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time.
28 When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good
things.
29 When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to
the dust.
30 When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.
31 May the glory of the LORD endure forever ;may the LORD rejoice in his works—
32 he who looks at the earth, and it trembles, who touches the mountains, and they smoke.
33 I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.
34 May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the LORD.
35 But may sinners vanish from the earth and the wicked be no more. Praise the LORD, O my soul.
Praise the LORD.

Like Psalm 103, this psalm begins and ends also with “Praise the LORD, O my soul.” This links both psalms together. In Psalm 103, the reason for praising the Lord is found in what God has done for man; in this psalm the whole of creation is encompassed. As we have already seen, Psalm 103 does not come further than to call for praise. In this psalm the poet turns directly to God in worship with the words: “O LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty.”

This psalm does not bear David’s name, but the Septuagint mentions David as the poet. Nature, as it is depicted in this psalm, is, in a sense, idyllic. There is no mention of the havoc sin caused. Sin is briefly mentioned in vs. 35, but of the “groaning as in the pains of childbirth” of which Paul speaks in Romans²⁵¹

²⁵¹ See Rom. 8:22

nothing is said here. The psalmist looks at creation in the light of God. He approaches the old creation as someone who has himself become a new creation.

Of the words "Praise the LORD, O my soul" we can say the same as in the previous psalm but here, the poet goes, after the mobilization of his soul, over to the act of worship and he adores. But the intimacy of his relationship with God is not yet perfect. He tries to imagine who God is. He tries to picture God, which is not the same thing as entering into the sanctuary and meeting God face to face. Real adoration, as we find that elsewhere in the psalms ("There will be silence before Thee, and praise in Zion, O God"),²⁵² is more than that. Yet, the way in which man draws here nigh to God is impressive.

We cannot imagine who God is. He is the Most High, *El Shadday*. The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain Him.²⁵³ The whole universe is too small for Him. If we become dizzy when we think of the distances between the solar systems that form the macrocosm, how much more when we try to imagine what the infinity of God is like! God said to Moses: "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."²⁵⁴

The images the psalmist uses are all borrowed from human experience. He pictures God as getting dressed. Without realizing this, the poet uses a language that is related to man's fall into sin. It is only after their act of disobedience that Adam and Eve felt ashamed because they were naked and they wanted to cover themselves with clothes. God's glory is an inner glory. He doesn't have to clothe Himself with splendor and majesty; He *is* splendor and majesty. The essence of God's glory becomes evident in Jesus' transfiguration. We read in Mark's Gospel: "After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them."²⁵⁵ Jesus' inner glory broke out through His clothing. God probably smiles when we try to describe Him in such clumsy terms.

It is possible for us to associate splendor and majesty with clothing but not with light. Light is not a covering. The Apostle John describes God with: "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."²⁵⁶ The light we know is a physical image of a spiritual reality. We first encounter light in the Bible in the creation story: "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."²⁵⁷ That this light was no sunlight is clear from the fact that the sun only appeared on the fourth day of creation. Biblical commentators usually do not treat this phenomenon as a problem which is an indication that they do not take the first chapters of Genesis very seriously. We hardly know what physical light is. This makes the existence of spiritual light an even greater mystery for us. Yet, we experience light as pleasant. We realize that light is of vital importance to our existence, both for our body as well as for our mind. David says: "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light."²⁵⁸ And, as we saw from the quote of John's First Epistle, he contrasts God's light with the darkness of sin. This makes light an image of holiness and purity. This is the reason a life in fellowship with God is called "walking in the light."

Light is also the source of all existing colors. Under certain conditions, light will break up in the colors of the rainbow. Color is an expression of the character of God. Our appreciation of color is actually a recognition of God's character. We feel ecstasy at the sight of a sunrise because we are related to God. John says that there is a rainbow around God's throne in heaven.²⁵⁹

The Tyndale Commentary observes: "There are some striking resemblances to the Egyptian Akhenaten's great Hymn to the Sun (14th century BC...), especially in the depicting of creatures of night and day..., of the provision for beasts and birds..., of the sea with its ships..., and of the life-and-death dependence of all creatures on their creator...." Most likely, the psalmist was familiar with that text and uses it at some places, while at others he distances himself from it.

The picture of God wrapping Himself in light as with a garment indicates that the sun is not a deity, but is itself subjected to God. All images used in the first four verses are borrowed from the space below the stratosphere; they belong to the earth, not to heaven. This is understandable since the psalmist is on earth, and he looks to God from an earthly perspective. The blue sky and the clouds form the boundaries

²⁵² Ps. 65:1 (NAS)

²⁵³ See I Kings 8:27

²⁵⁴ Ex. 33:20

²⁵⁵ Mark 9:2,3

²⁵⁶ I John 1:5

²⁵⁷ Gen. 1:3

²⁵⁸ Ps. 36:9

²⁵⁹ See Rev. 4:3

of his field of vision. This does in no way diminish God's greatness. The poet speaks about God in the greatest terms that are in man's vocabulary and he makes clear that God is greater than all he can say about Him. As the body is more than clothing so is God more than the light in which He wraps Himself and more than the clouds on which His chariot rides.

This riding on the clouds evokes images that are used elsewhere in the Bible about Christ's return. In His answer to the high priest Caiaphas, Jesus quoted from Daniel's prophecy, saying: "In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."²⁶⁰

Another interesting part is that the Epistle to the Hebrews quotes vs. 4 in reverse: "In speaking of the angels he says, 'He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire.'²⁶¹ The verse in Hebrews is a quotation from the Septuagint. The implication is that angels manifest themselves in nature in the same way as God Himself does.

The verses 5-23 give a description of the earth almost in the order of creation that we read about in Genesis Chapter One. *The Tyndale Commentary* draws the comparison further by connecting Day One with vs. 2^a, Day Two with the verses 2-4, Day Three with the verses 5-9 and the verses 14-17, Day Four with the verses 19-23, Day five with the verses 25,26, and Day Six with the verses 21-24 and 27,28. We cannot really put the two portions together, like pieces on top one of the other, but the resemblance is striking.

When we read about the earth that "it can never be moved," it doesn't mean that God guarantees the eternal existence of the planet. The Apostle Peter prophesied that: "The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare."²⁶² This, probably, does not mean that the earth will return to the chaotic condition that existed before the Lord let His creative voice be heard. It rather sounds like the promise God gave Noah when he said: "Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."²⁶³ This same promise is repeated in vs. 9 of this psalm, where the psalmist, speaking about the waters of the flood, says: "You set a boundary they cannot cross; never again will they cover the earth."

If it is true, as some people believe, that the earth's chaos in the opening verses of Genesis was the result of the fall of Lucifer, then the verses 5-9 acquire a deeper meaning. "At your rebuke the waters fled, at the sound of your thunder they took to flight" speaks then about God's victory over the Evil One. And the promise that the earth will never be covered with water anymore is, in more than one sense, a warrantee of our protection against the power of darkness. This also gives greater depth to the praise of this psalm. It is this great and glorious God who has taken us under His wing.

Even without the above theological implications, the creation of the mountains and the oceans is awesome. The sight of snow-covered mountain peaks has always made an overwhelming impression on me. People who try to climb Mount Everest to stand on The Roof of the World accomplish a super-human feat. There is in the ecstasy of reaching a mountain peak more theology than the climber often realizes.

In verses 10-13 the water is restrained. The water here is no longer the enemy in which the psalmist can drown but a source of life of which he can drink. Noah's flood is reduced to springs and brooks that flow down from the mountaintops. The animals drink and the birds sing in the trees. God's majesty reveals itself, not only in the mighty flood and in the rarefied air of the mountain peaks, but also in the green pastures. The rain is called here "the fruit of his works." Man also finds satisfaction, since he understands what happens and who makes it happen.

The earth that is described in the verses 14 and 15 is not the ground of which God said to Adam: "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life."²⁶⁴ It is as if the psalmist, on purpose, puts the clock back to demonstrate that the earth, as we know it now, is not the earth that God had prepared for man. Corruption is not part of the original design. It is not what God created but what man made of it.

The provision of man's need is expressed in terms of wine, oil, and bread. This clearly refers to more than the satisfaction of man's physical needs; it pertains to the heart. "Wine that gladdens the heart of man, ...and bread that sustains his heart." Before Adam fell into sin, there was no distinction between the feeding of the body and the feeding of the soul. To live "by bread alone" was unknown. Jesus restored the harmony in the institution of the Lord's Supper. Since sin entered the world, man can eat and drink and

²⁶⁰ Matt. 26:64, see Daniel 7:13-14

²⁶¹ Heb. 1:7

²⁶² II Pet. 3:10

²⁶³ Gen. 9:11

²⁶⁴ Gen. 3:17

remain inwardly empty. In the new creation, it is possible to have an empty stomach and yet to be spiritually fulfilled. At present we have come to the point where eating and drinking are often considered unspiritual activities. This has never been God's intention.

The psalmist takes several steps upward in his description of the grass, the plants, the trees, and the high mountains. In this way, he guides our eyes upward until, looking at the moon, we look toward heaven itself.

Strangely enough, the period described in the verses 19-21 is not the day but the night. The moon comes up and the sun goes under, but the following darkness is God's darkness. The one who is called "the Prince of Darkness" is not even mentioned here. The devil is not found at all in this psalm. We only see his vanishing shadow briefly in the last verse. The inhabitants of this darkness are nocturnal creatures. The lion is mentioned specifically, although he is not a typical night-animal. The association between the lion and the night is found in the fact that they are both outside man's normal domain. But both day and night belong to God. The roaring of the lion is directed toward God, as is man's psalm. That which is hostile to man is not hostile to God. To us, the irreconcilable differences in nature all find their solution in the fact that God created them and that they are all in His hand.

The psalmist does not look for a theological explanation of the roaring of the lion for prey. He is not bothered by the fact that "one man's death is another man's bread." He also passes by the fact that, as a result of the fall, "the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth." He only pauses to hear the awesome roaring of the lion in the night and says to himself that God hears this roar. One doesn't have to understand everything in order to be able to praise God! He accepts the contrasts as a divine rhythm of life.

In the order of the night and the day we find something of the Jewish concept that the day begins in the evening. This order was established in the Genesis account of creation: "And there was evening, and there was morning--the first day."²⁶⁵

There is a striking difference between the quiet amazement of the psalmist over the rhythm of God's creation and the bored account of Ecclesiastes: "What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?... All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing."²⁶⁶ How refreshing it is when we compare the psalmist's exclamation to this: "How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures." When he says: "How many..." he doesn't mean to give the sum of one enormous addition but he wants to indicate that what God does surpasses all human mathematics. The total of all God's creatures, from microbes to sea monsters is incalculable. Even if they could be numbered, the total would only be a figure at one particular moment in time. Only God is up-to-date up to the split-second. The numbers and sheer abundance testify to the wisdom of God.

The vast and spacious sea, mentioned in vs. 25, is the Mediterranean. I wonder what the psalmist would say had he been able to stand at the beach of the Pacific Ocean. Vs. 26 reads in the NIV: "There the ships go to and fro, and the leviathan, which you formed to frolic there." The "Leviathan" is the translation of the Hebrew word *livyathan* which is defined as "a wreathed animal, i.e. a serpent (especially the crocodile or some other large sea monster)." TLB renders the verse with: "The whale you made to play in the sea." Some interpreters think that the leviathan was a pre-historical or mythological animal. It seems inconceivable, however, that the Holy Spirit would use the image of an creature that no longer or never existed.

The verses 27 and 28 have, of course, a much wider application than to the fish of the sea alone. Every creature looks hopefully toward the Lord for its sustenance, not only for its nourishment but for the satisfaction of all its needs. According to *The Tyndale Commentary*, these verses are an imitation of the Egyptian Akhenaten's great Hymn to the Sun mentioned above. Velishovsky, in his book *Worlds in Collision*, develops a theory that the worship of the sun as a deity, both in Egypt as in South America, dates from the time of the standing still of the sun as described in Joshua. We read there: "On the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel: 'O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon.' So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when

²⁶⁵ Gen. 1:5

²⁶⁶ Eccl. 1:3,8

the LORD listened to a man. Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel!"²⁶⁷ In this psalm, however, the object is not the sun but God who created the sun and who is the source and maintainer of all life.

It is so easy for man to fall into the trap of believing that he is able to foresee in his own needs. The fact that often he has to work hard for it tends to strengthen this misconception. For that reason it is good to remember this example of the animals. Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel: "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"²⁶⁸ It sounds as if Jesus advocates a reckless insouciance. Obviously, the Lord does not want us to live irresponsibly, but He wants us to understand who the Father is who opens His hand to satisfy all of creation with good things.

Satan will draw our attention to the fact that people perish in famines but then we can turn around and ask him whose fault it is that death entered this world. It is true that these verses do not take into account the dichotomy of life. This psalm tries to draw a picture of the original relationship between the creator and creation. What Jesus meant was not that we should deny the hard realities of life, but that we can break through the impasse by faith. This faith is expressed in the words: "These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time."

In a lecture series about the Sermon on the Mount, John Stott remarked that Jesus' statement that the birds do not sow or reap or store away in barns does not imply that they don't have to make an effort to get their food. They have to fly, seek, and scratch the soil, before being satisfied with good things. The lesson, however, is that effort and exertion by themselves are not sufficient. Solomon said: "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain."²⁶⁹

This is also the meaning of vs. 29 – "When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust." God does not play a game of hide-and-seek with His creation when the stakes are life-and-death if He doesn't look. Every living thing has to learn the lesson of being dependant upon God, just as everyone has to learn that there are more important things than food and drink. Moses expressed this lesson, that is the hardest of all to learn, when he said: "He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."²⁷⁰

It seems as if the order is reversed in this stanza; the sending out of the Spirit for the purpose of creation should be at the beginning. A closer look, however, indicates that we are dealing with a spiritual sequence. First, there is physical life and its maintenance. This is followed by death and return to dust. But this is not the end. God's Spirit renews the face of the earth and creates life out of death. These verses refer to the resurrection from the dead. There is an implicit reference to the fall in these verses.

It is in connection with the resurrection and the renewal of life that the psalmist opens the last stanza with: "May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works." This has, evidently, been the theme of this psalm from the very beginning. This is also the reason that there was hardly any reference to sin and Satan in this psalm. The psalm is a prophecy about the new earth.

The glory of the Lord will endure forever, whether the psalmist wishes this or not. The value of this wish lies in the fact that man recognizes this and longs for it. When man reaches out for an eternity full of God's lovingkindness, he is blessed. This blessedness means sharing in the joy of the Lord. This is why Jesus, in the Parable of the Talents, says to the faithful servant: "Come and share your master's happiness!"²⁷¹ Or as the KJV has it: "Enter thou into the joy of thy lord." There is, in this sin-spoiled world, still enough evidence of God's glory for us to image what the joy of the new creation will be like. The fact that, as Christians, we are a new creation enables us to experience the essence of it within ourselves.

The awesomeness of God's character should never become vague or common in our minds. Intimacy with God may never turn into disrespectfulness. He is the God who "who looks at the earth, and it trembles, who touches the mountains, and they smoke." God is very great, as the opening verse states.

When the psalmist says that he wants to sing to the Lord all his life, he means that he wants to be what God wants him to be. Man was created for the purpose of glorifying God. It is good to set as our life's

²⁶⁷ Josh. 10:12-14

²⁶⁸ Matt. 6:26

²⁶⁹ Ps. 127:1

²⁷⁰ Deut. 8:3

²⁷¹ Matt. 25:21

goal the goal for which God created us. It sounds as if there is a trace of doubt in the words: “May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the LORD.” We can say with our mouth that we want to praise the Lord but then we find within ourselves feelings and thoughts that rebel against this desire. If we want to praise God, the desire to do so will have to come from God Himself. If we have to depend upon ourselves to reach our life’s goal, we will soon find ourselves to be between a rock and a hard place. The duplicity of our heart constantly accuses us before the Lord. But there is a solution with God even for this deep root of evil in our life. The Apostle John writes in his Epistle: “This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.”²⁷² According to John, the proof that we belong to the truth is not in that our hearts do not condemn us but that we allow the Holy Spirit to overcome our guilt feelings. The psalmist is safe, even for his own meditations, as long as he rejoices in the Lord. “The joy of the LORD is [y]our strength”²⁷³ even in the face of the fiercest accusations of the enemy. The Lord Jesus Christ gave us the clearest example of this “joy of the Lord” when He found Himself in situations that ought to have been great disappointments for Him. When the spiritual leaders of Israel turned against Him, we read in Matthew’s Gospel: “At that time Jesus said, ‘I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.’”²⁷⁴ Luke introduces Jesus’ words with: “At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit. . . .”²⁷⁵

The last verse of this psalm is no contradiction to the preceding verses. There will be no more sinners and wicked people in God’s world. The verse contains a condemnation of those who refuse to acknowledge: “O LORD my God, you are very great.” Imagine that there would always remain a place for those who consistently oppose the truth! That would be unjust for those who worship God. There was nothing unspiritual in the sense of relief the world felt at the news that Hitler was dead. It is part of our praise that God handles justly with people who do not want to be converted to Him.

²⁷² I John 3:19-20

²⁷³ Neh. 8:10

²⁷⁴ Matt. 11:25,26

²⁷⁵ Luke 10:21

PSALM ONE HUNDRED FIVE

- 1 Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done.
 - 2 Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts.
 - 3 Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.
 - 4 Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.
 - 5 Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced,
 - 6 O descendants of Abraham his servant, O sons of Jacob, his chosen ones.
 - 7 He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth.
 - 8 He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations,
 - 9 the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac.
 - 10 He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant:
 - 11 "To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit."
 - 12 When they were but few in number, few indeed, and strangers in it,
 - 13 they wandered from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another.
 - 14 He allowed no one to oppress them; for their sake he rebuked kings:
 - 15 "Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm."
 - 16 He called down famine on the land and destroyed all their supplies of food;
 - 17 and he sent a man before them-- Joseph, sold as a slave.
 - 18 They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons,
 - 19 till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the LORD proved him true.
 - 20 The king sent and released him, the ruler of peoples set him free.
 - 21 He made him master of his household, ruler over all he possessed,
 - 22 to instruct his princes as he pleased and teach his elders wisdom.
 - 23 Then Israel entered Egypt; Jacob lived as an alien in the land of Ham.
 - 24 The LORD made his people very fruitful; he made them too numerous for their foes,
 - 25 whose hearts he turned to hate his people, to conspire against his servants.
 - 26 He sent Moses his servant, and Aaron, whom he had chosen.
 - 27 They performed his miraculous signs among them, his wonders in the land of Ham.
 - 28 He sent darkness and made the land dark-- for had they not rebelled against his words?
 - 29 He turned their waters into blood, causing their fish to die.
 - 30 Their land teemed with frogs, which went up into the bedrooms of their rulers.
 - 31 He spoke, and there came swarms of flies, and gnats throughout their country.
 - 32 He turned their rain into hail, with lightning throughout their land;
 - 33 he struck down their vines and fig trees and shattered the trees of their country.
 - 34 He spoke, and the locusts came, grasshoppers without number;
 - 35 they ate up every green thing in their land, ate up the produce of their soil.
 - 36 Then he struck down all the firstborn in their land, the firstfruits of all their manhood.
 - 37 He brought out Israel, laden with silver and gold, and from among their tribes no one faltered.
 - 38 Egypt was glad when they left, because dread of Israel had fallen on them.
 - 39 He spread out a cloud as a covering, and a fire to give light at night.
 - 40 They asked, and he brought them quail and satisfied them with the bread of heaven.
 - 41 He opened the rock, and water gushed out; like a river it flowed in the desert.
 - 42 For he remembered his holy promise given to his servant Abraham.
 - 43 He brought out his people with rejoicing, his chosen ones with shouts of joy;
 - 44 he gave them the lands of the nations, and they fell heir to what others had toiled for--
 - 45 that they might keep his precepts and observe his laws.
- Praise the LORD.*

This psalm gives us a historical review of the birth of a nation. The psalmist begins with Abraham and ends with the entrance of Israel into Canaan, covering a period of over four hundred years. Even in the days when people like Abraham and Jacob lived to be over one hundred years old, the period covered in this psalm spans more than the life of one human being. God had revealed to Abraham what He intended to do, and so Abraham could understand the meaning of his own experiences. He was able to look at life from God's perspective and understand his place in it. This must have kept him from getting bogged down in life.

The same principle is valid for those who are in Christ Jesus. We know from where we came and where we are going, and, consequently, we can determine our present position. *The Tyndale Commentary* observes correctly that God counts every Christian as being a child of Abraham. The Apostle Paul emphasizes this in his Epistle to the Galatians, where we read: "Consider Abraham: 'He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.' So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. ...Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise."²⁷⁶

In the interpretation of this psalm we have to remember that the history of Israel is, at the same time, the history of God's revelation in this world. We may, therefore, consider this psalm as being addressed to us. The last verse of the first stanza (vs. 6) clearly speaks to the "descendants of Abraham" and to the "sons of Jacob," and calls us "his chosen ones."

As we shall see later, this psalm and the following one, obviously, belong together. Psalm 106 covers approximately the same time period, but it deals with the negative reaction of man to God's revelation. In this psalm, the theme is the miracle of God's revelation. That makes this psalm just as joyful as the following one is sad.

The first stanza gives an exhortation to those who know God to take their fellowship with Him seriously. He is the God who performs wonders and miracles. The psalmist uses eleven different verbs to describe the responsibility of the person who has fellowship with the Lord: 1. give thanks, 2. call on his name, 3. make known, 4. sing, 5. sing praise, 6. tell, 7. glory, 8. rejoice, 9. look, 10. seek, 11. remember. These verbs are eleven points of a sermon that we should remember all our life.

The first thing we should do, on the basis of the fact that God has revealed Himself as our redeemer, is to give thanks. Some commentators believe that the last "Hallelujah" at the end of the previous psalm, actually, belongs to this one. As we mentioned earlier, the reason for our being on earth is to give thanks and praise to the Lord. It is our foremost task as human beings.

Calling on God's name means appropriation of His salvation. The Apostle Paul writes: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."²⁷⁷

"Make known among the nations what he has done" is a call to world evangelization, a task which Israel never fully fulfilled. Israel's history of salvation was meant to be an invitation and a warning to the whole world. But Israel has always believed that the exodus was meant, exclusively, for them alone or, at the most, as an example for their enemies that God would punish them as He had punished Egypt. Yet, God's promise to Abraham included "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you."²⁷⁸

We can say the same about the facts of salvation that form the basis of our redemption. We are never saved for our own benefit alone, or even primarily. Both Moses and Paul were aware of this when they proposed to God that their names would be wiped out of the Book of Life.²⁷⁹ We ought to realize clearly what the essence of our salvation is. In the words of the Apostle Paul: "And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."²⁸⁰ If we live no longer for ourselves but for Him who died for us and them, world evangelization will follow logically.

How the message is to be preached is set forth clearly in vs. 2 – "Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts." Our preaching has to take the form of praise. This defines the core of the matter. The main purpose of world evangelization is that God be praised. Salvation and conversion are steps toward this goal. If the salvation and redemption of man does not result in worship, then this salvation is, in a sense, in vain. The best stimulant to salvation is in the reporting of the facts. Worship and praise are less a matter of feeling oneself "in the seventh heaven" as in analyzing what happened on earth. The greatest miracle that ever happened, the one that should amaze us eternally, is that the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. The Lord of glory lowered Himself to a death on a cross. If ever we get used to these facts, our worship will cease to be.

Glorying in His holy Name means the building up of our new man. Our glorying in God involves much more than refraining from boasting in ourselves. That would only be a negative act. It means that

²⁷⁶ Gal. 3:6-10; 4:28

²⁷⁷ Rom. 10:13

²⁷⁸ Gen. 12:3

²⁷⁹ See Ex. 32:32 and Rom. 9:3

²⁸⁰ II Cor. 5:15

God is our honor and glory. The Apostle Paul says so beautifully: “[God] chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-- and the things that are not-- to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-- that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.’”²⁸¹ God will ultimately share His full glory with us. We read about “the bride of the Lamb,” the New Jerusalem that: “It shone with the glory of God.”²⁸²

This future glory may be a source of joy for us in the present. Seeking and finding are identical in the Bible, although, in our experience, they are separated by time and space. We are on our way to God but, in a sense, we have reached Him already. Our seeking is more a matter of growing than of not yet possessing. Seeking and joy also go together. It means a constant returning to the source that we had already discovered. The psalmist means to say that we ought to rejoice constantly in the facts of salvation, which are the topic of this psalm. The subject is what God has done for us, His chosen children. It began with one man to whom God promised the land, and it ends with the occupation of the Promised Land.

Vs. 4 deals with the strength of God and the consistency of our fellowship with Him. The Hebrew word translated with “strength” is *oz* which has also the meaning of “security.” It occurs in combination words like *ma`oz* which means “a fortified place” or “stronghold.” As such it is used in Nehemiah’s admonition to the people: “The joy of the LORD is your strength.”²⁸³ Looking to the Lord and to His strength is identical with putting ourselves under His protection. We are never called upon to defend ourselves, neither against the devil nor against men. If we are under God’s protection, He takes responsibility for our defense.

“Look to the Lord” implies that there are certain conditions we have to fulfill. Without confession of our sins and a full surrender to Him, we will never experience the full riches of His strength. The lesson we have to keep on learning all through life is that the strength is His and not ours. We do not become strong. God will, purposely, allow weakness in our lives so that we will not lose sight of the real source of our abilities. Paul gives a clear testimony about one point when he talks about his “thorn in the flesh.”²⁸⁴

In these verses the psalmist speaks clearly about the tension of faith. Faith always makes us reach out to that which is actually beyond our reach. Fellowship with God is a supernatural experience and we are natural, earth-bound beings. This is the reason for our looking to God, hoping that He will look at us. The accent in vs. 4 is on the word “always.” We should always stretch ourselves out to Him. The open beaks of the little birds in the nest are a good picture of what our attitude toward God ought to be. Even if we have been filled with the Holy Spirit, we have received only a foretaste of the full satisfaction we will taste when God will wipe away all tears from our eyes.

Our life on earth is, in a sense, an adaptation to a situation and condition that was caused by the entrance of sin into the world. There are some moments of actual ecstasy and glory but then there is a return to remembering miracles that occurred only in the past. The purpose of this is so that we do not lose sight of the reality in which we live. Even if we live in fellowship with God on a supernatural level, we do not go from one miracle to the other. Our lives never consist of a series of uninterrupted divine interventions. The greater part of our lives will consist in a routine existence. There is always a danger that we will accept the routine as a normal way of life. It is only by faith that we can see that the miracles God performs, however small their percentage in life may be, are demonstrations of the normal Christian life. The important thing is that, in times of crisis, we turn to Him who performed the miracles. It is not wrong to ask the question Gideon asked: “Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about...?”²⁸⁵ That is not the same thing as “living in the past.” It is rather a realization that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”²⁸⁶

The wonders, miracles, and judgments refer, of course, to the plagues of Egypt. But we can also say that the every miracle God performs for us is, in a sense, a judgment upon us. God did not punish the Egyptians because of their sins and redeem the Israelites because they had not sinned. Israel’s firstborn would have died also if the blood had not been applied to their doorposts. They did not enter judgment

²⁸¹ I Cor. 1:28-31

²⁸² Rev. 21:11

²⁸³ Neh. 8:10

²⁸⁴ See II Cor. 12:7-10

²⁸⁵ Judges 6:13

²⁸⁶ Heb. 13:8

because they had already “crossed over from death to life.”²⁸⁷ For us also, death lies behind us. All the supernatural elements of our present life testify to this.

We should also remember that it is God’s Word that judges. The NIV translates vs. 5 with “the judgments he pronounced.” The Hebrew reads literally “the judgments of his mouth” which means the Word He speaks. For us this judgment comes to us in the form of the written Word, the Bible which searches and analyzes us and which brings to light what has gone wrong in our lives. For this reason, Bible reading is an important facet of the supernatural life in fellowship with God. As the children of Abraham and Jacob, God’s chosen ones, we cannot function normally without our “quiet time.” The Apostle Paul states several times that we are Abraham’s children. In Romans we read: “Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring- not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.”²⁸⁸ In his epistle to the Galatians he writes: “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise. ...Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.”²⁸⁹

In the second stanza (verses 7-11), the psalmist places God’s promise to Abraham and Isaac in a universal context. It is no longer about Israel and Canaan but it concerns the whole world. God who revealed Himself to Moses as YHWH, the “I AM,” is the God whose “judgments are in all the earth.” His covenant is an eternal covenant. The promise to Abraham is the Holy Spirit, according to what Paul writes to the Galatians: “He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”²⁹⁰ And the eternal covenant is the covenant in the blood of Christ, mentioned in the Epistle to the Hebrews: “May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep...”²⁹¹ Obviously, much more is involved than the prince of a nomadic tribe and a roaming people trekking from Egypt to Canaan. What God did for Israel has significance for all the earth, for all of mankind. Every person needs deliverance from slavery and every one has to be led through the wilderness of this world into the Sabbath rest of God. What the British author G. H. Wells once said that the history of a nomadic people of several thousands of years ago had no significance for him, proves that he had never grasped the meaning of life.

Different words are used to describe the relationship between God and man: “judgments, (everlasting) covenant, the word, the oath, a decree, the portion you will inherit.” The synonyms clarify the various aspects of God’s composite eternal plan for man. “Judgments” speaks about the tension between God’s holiness and our sin. “Covenant” and “everlasting covenant” indicates that God backs up His promises with all the attributes of His being. The word “oath” emphasizes this even more. The promise is absolutely reliable because the One who made it cannot lie. “A decree” is only effective if it is obeyed. “The Word” is the creative, powerful element, but also, that part of God’s being that took upon itself the form of a man and that dwelt among us. “Inheritance” (the portion you will inherit) is the fulfillment of all God planned when He created man. Canaan is an image of all of the above, but the reality belongs to us.

This stanza also throws light on the way in which God deals with man. He called Abraham as one single individual from among the whole world population. Abraham was not the only person who knew God. His encounter with Melchizedek proves this.²⁹² God chose Abraham in order to begin the history of revelation with him. The characteristic of this history is faith, that is confidence in God on the basis of the reliability of His person. Abraham never received any of God’s promises with the exception of Isaac. And Isaac’s birth was enough of a miracle for Abraham to trust that everything else would happen as God had said. The essence of God’s promise was the inheritance, symbolized in Canaan. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews deals with this subject in a very profound way, calling it entering into the Sabbath rest of God.²⁹³ This rest is the perfect unity of man with the Father in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. God makes us share in His glory. That is what it is all about.

The verses 12-15 deal with the years between Abraham’s call and the departure of Jacob to Egypt. This period is described in Genesis, chapters 12-46. Abraham was one single person when he set out for

²⁸⁷ See John 5:24

²⁸⁸ Rom. 4:16

²⁸⁹ Gal. 3:29; 4:28

²⁹⁰ Gal. 3:14

²⁹¹ Heb. 13:20

²⁹² See Gen. 14:18-20

²⁹³ See Heb. ch. 3 and 4

Canaan. According to the Genesis account, the group that went to Egypt “were seventy in all.”²⁹⁴ Abraham and his descendants were nomads. They trekked around the land according to the availability of grazing land for their flocks. Their roaming around was not always a positive experience. Twice, Abraham deceived his hosts by saying that Sarah was his sister. This caused him to become “persona non grata” in Egypt.²⁹⁵ Isaac did the same thing.²⁹⁶

We should not conclude from the fact that God protected both families that He overlooked their sins. Even though Abraham and Isaac did not receive any immediate punishment from God, their testimony suffered considerably. Yet, God calls them “My anointed ones,” and “My prophets.” This seems hard to reconcile. Yet the Bible gives us numerous examples of God’s protection over people who hardly cared about Him. Sometimes the sins committed by believers are much more serious than those committed by unbelievers, as was the case with David whose sin seems more heinous than that of Saul. The difference is in confession and forgiveness. The “anointed ones” and “prophets” are not people who never sinned but people who have been washed of their guilt in the blood of the Lamb.

The fourth stanza (verses 16-22) tells the story of Joseph. This account is found in Genesis chapters 37, and 39-45. This part of the Old Testament is one of the most moving stories ever told. The seven-year famine that struck the Middle East around 1500 BC is called here an act of God. This does not mean that God is the author of hunger and the immense suffering that resulted from it. God did not invent the plan to murder Joseph nor of his slavery in Egypt. All this was the devil’s work. Joseph’s brothers were fully responsible for their crimes. Joseph himself testified: “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”²⁹⁷ What happened in the world at large and in Joseph’s personal life was the result of man’s fall into sin. It was the work of Satan but God somehow used it for His purpose. The Bible never gives credit to the devil for the evil he produces. Neither Joseph, nor his brothers had any idea that God was preparing their salvation in all the events that occurred. The brothers, probably, never took time to consider this. They only intended to rid themselves of Joseph, and they were enticed by the money they got from his sale. Joseph cannot possibly have understood either what happened to him. Even if he kept on relating his experiences with the dreams he had dreamed earlier, he could hardly have believed that his slavery and imprisonment were the fulfillment of those dreams. Yet God’s presence must have been enough of a reality for him to pull him through and to keep him from losing his faith. The important truth of these verses is that Joseph’s deep suffering was part of God’s plan. This made Joseph’s experience a picture of the Incarnation. The whole world is saved because of the suffering, death, and glorification of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Vs. 18 reads in the NIV – “his neck was put in irons.” The Hebrew word is *nephesh* which literally means “a breathing creature.” Elsewhere it is translated with “a living soul,” as in the verse: “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”²⁹⁸ *The Tyndale Commentary* observes: “Coverdale’s haunting expression, ‘the iron entered into his soul’ (PBV), comes from the Vulgate, not the Hebrew. The latter has it the other way around: ‘his *nepes* entered into iron’, where *nepes* can mean ‘soul’, ‘life’, ‘self’, or possibly... ‘throat’ – hence ‘iron collar’ of most modern translations.” The Amplified Bible reads: “And his soul entered the iron.” This describes a period of approximately 13 years between his being sold to Egypt and his being elevated to viceroy over Egypt. The Hebrew expresses the intensity of Joseph’s suffering.

“What he foretold came to pass” (vs. 19), undoubtedly refers to Joseph’s explanation of the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker.²⁹⁹ It seems strange that Joseph knew how to interpret dreams of other people; yet he didn’t know what to do with his own dreams! Or did he know? It would, however, not be unusual if Joseph had had more insight into the lives of others than in his own.

The phrases “till what he foretold came to pass,” and “till the word of the LORD proved him true” are used as poetical parallels, as having an identical meaning. The word of a man is placed here on the same level as the Word of the Lord. It is this Word of the Lord that proved him right and rehabilitated him. Joseph was a prophet. The Word of God came through him to others. Nobody had ever considered the dreams he had had as a seventeen-year-old as being prophecies, certainly not his brothers. It is possible that

²⁹⁴ Gen. 46:27

²⁹⁵ See Gen.12:10-20; 20:1-18

²⁹⁶ See Gen. 26:7:11

²⁹⁷ Gen. 50:20

²⁹⁸ Gen. 2:7 (KJV)

²⁹⁹ Gen. ch. 40

Jacob had a suspicion that there was more behind the dreams than met the eye. We read: "His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind."³⁰⁰ But there is no indication that, upon receiving the news about Joseph's death, Jacob clung to Joseph's dreams and drew hope and faith from them. Only at the end of his life, when the whole picture had become clear, it must have become evident to Jacob that God had wanted to tell him something through Joseph's dreams. Joseph was proved right, first of all by God Himself and, subsequently, by human powers. God rehabilitated him first and man followed. The result was that he could "instruct his princes as he pleased and teach his elders wisdom." The authority that comes from God is stronger and God's wisdom is wiser than what man can produce.

Jacob's arrival in Egypt is only mentioned briefly. The psalmist concentrates more on the 400-year-long stay of Israel as a nation. The description of Egypt as "the land of Ham" throws an interesting light upon the dispersion of the sons of Noah. When Jacob arrived in Egypt, Pharaoh was still sympathetic toward Israel. We do not know when the change of mood occurred. We read, however, in Exodus: "Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt."³⁰¹ This change of attitude of the Egyptians toward Israel is in this psalm also attributed to God.

The sending of Moses and Aaron, recording in Exodus, is, in itself a historical novel. The events were, actually, too fantastic for a novel. Of all the plagues mentioned in Exodus, the psalmist mentions only eight. The plague among livestock and also boils on humans are omitted. The plagues are not mentioned chronologically either; the ninth plague of darkness is mentioned first, and the plagues of the gnats and flies are reversed. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart is not mentioned at all. The emphasis is rather upon sympathetic attitude of the Egyptian people toward the Israelites. In the plague of darkness, God gave to Pharaoh some of his own medicine. His kingdom was part of the kingdom of darkness. God made the Egyptians feel what would be the end result if they kept on obeying the lord of darkness. The order the psalmist follows here has a symbolic meaning. We are given the impression that the tyranny of Egypt over Israel was the work of a handful of people, like the reign of terror of Adolph Hitler. We read in Exodus: "The LORD made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and Moses himself was highly regarded in Egypt by Pharaoh's officials and by the people."³⁰² Vs. 38 of this psalm indicates that the Egyptians may have had a bad conscience and that it was a moral relief to them when Israel left and it was all over. The presence of God's Spirit in the midst of Egypt's spiritual darkness was so palpable that the Egyptians felt it as a relief when He departed. It must have been similar to the experience of the people in the region of the Gerasenes whose pigs were invaded by the spirits Jesus had cast out of a man. We read: "Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region."³⁰³ Without conversion and surrender, the presence of the Holy Spirit is unbearable for man.

The last stanza (verses 39-45) summarizes the whole desert journey and the conquest of Canaan in only a few words, emphasizing the supernatural elements. God's presence in Israel demonstrated itself in the Shekinah that protected and illuminated the people. This psalm does not mention the negative aspects such as the murmuring of the people, their discontent, and their suspicion which accompanied most of the miracles. Those features are kept for the next psalm. The full emphasis here is upon the joy of fellowship with God, their Redeemer. The Jews quoted the last part of vs. 40 – "[He] satisfied them with the bread of heaven" in an effort to move Jesus to repeat the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 on a daily basis. They said: "Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"³⁰⁴ They had, evidently, never understood the significance of God's miraculous provisions during the desert crossing, nor the meaning of Jesus' miracle. God had, for a period of forty years, given an abundance of bread, meat, and water in a place where death reigned in a radius of hundreds of miles and where man was doomed to die. God did this on the basis of His promise to Abraham. The essence of God's promise to Abraham was the gift of the Holy Spirit. In Paul's words: "He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."³⁰⁵

³⁰⁰ Gen. 37:11

³⁰¹ Ex. 1:8

³⁰² Ex. 11:3

³⁰³ Mark 5:17

³⁰⁴ John 6:31

³⁰⁵ Gal. 3:14

This is what God had in mind when He kept Israel alive in the desert of death. When God led Israel out of Egypt, He must have envisioned the end result centuries later: the New Jerusalem, filled with the glory of God. The joy in this stanza is more a heavenly joy than joy on earth. Heavenly joy is, of course, the greater of the two. The joy a person experiences when he is converted is small in comparison with the shouts of joy of the angels in heaven. Man on earth often understands little of what happens to him. When Israel was born as a nation, the people were too much occupied with the labor pains to understand the meaning of God's mighty deeds. If we learn to see our own experiences in the light of God, we will only have one response: "Hallelujah!" (Praise the LORD).

PSALM ONE HUNDRED SIX

- 1 *Praise the LORD. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.*
- 2 *Who can proclaim the mighty acts of the LORD or fully declare his praise?*
- 3 *Blessed are they who maintain justice, who constantly do what is right.*
- 4 *Remember me, O LORD, when you show favor to your people, come to my aid when you save them,*
- 5 *that I may enjoy the prosperity of your chosen ones, that I may share in the joy of your nation*
and join your inheritance in giving praise.
- 6 *We have sinned, even as our fathers did; we have done wrong and acted wickedly.*
- 7 *When our fathers were in Egypt, they gave no thought to your miracles; they did not remember your*
many kindnesses, and they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea.
- 8 *Yet he saved them for his name's sake, to make his mighty power known.*
- 9 *He rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up; he led them through the depths as through a desert.*
- 10 *He saved them from the hand of the foe; from the hand of the enemy he redeemed them.*
- 11 *The waters covered their adversaries; not one of them survived.*
- 12 *Then they believed his promises and sang his praise.*
- 13 *But they soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his counsel.*
- 14 *In the desert they gave in to their craving; in the wasteland they put God to the test.*
- 15 *So he gave them what they asked for, but sent a wasting disease upon them.*
- 16 *In the camp they grew envious of Moses and of Aaron, who was consecrated to the LORD.*
- 17 *The earth opened up and swallowed Dathan; it buried the company of Abiram.*
- 18 *Fire blazed among their followers; a flame consumed the wicked.*
- 19 *At Horeb they made a calf and worshiped an idol cast from metal.*
- 20 *They exchanged their Glory for an image of a bull, which eats grass.*
- 21 *They forgot the God who saved them, who had done great things in Egypt,*
- 22 *miracles in the land of Ham and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.*
- 23 *So he said he would destroy them-- had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him*
to keep his wrath from destroying them.
- 24 *Then they despised the pleasant land; they did not believe his promise.*
- 25 *They grumbled in their tents and did not obey the LORD.*
- 26 *So he swore to them with uplifted hand that he would make them fall in the desert,*
- 27 *make their descendants fall among the nations and scatter them throughout the lands.*
- 28 *They yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor and ate sacrifices offered to lifeless gods;*
- 29 *they provoked the LORD to anger by their wicked deeds, and a plague broke out among them.*
- 30 *But Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was checked.*
- 31 *This was credited to him as righteousness for endless generations to come.*
- 32 *By the waters of Meribah they angered the LORD, and trouble came to Moses because of them;*
- 33 *for they rebelled against the Spirit of God, and rash words came from Moses' lips.*
- 34 *They did not destroy the peoples as the LORD had commanded them,*
- 35 *but they mingled with the nations and adopted their customs.*
- 36 *They worshiped their idols, which became a snare to them.*
- 37 *They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons.*
- 38 *They shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols*
of Canaan, and the land was desecrated by their blood.
- 39 *They defiled themselves by what they did; by their deeds they prostituted themselves.*
- 40 *Therefore the LORD was angry with his people and abhorred his inheritance.*
- 41 *He handed them over to the nations, and their foes ruled over them.*
- 42 *Their enemies oppressed them and subjected them to their power.*
- 43 *Many times he delivered them, but they were bent on rebellion and they wasted away in their sin.*
- 44 *But he took note of their distress when he heard their cry;*
- 45 *for their sake he remembered his covenant and out of his great love he relented.*
- 46 *He caused them to be pitied by all who held them captive.*
- 47 *Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy*
name and glory in your praise.
- 48 *Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Let all the people say,*
"Amen!" Praise the LORD.

This psalm shows us the other side of the coin that was displayed for us in Psalm 105. There, the emphasis was upon the miraculous aspect of God's dealings with Israel; here we see how the people reacted to God's acts with a lack of understanding, with a demonstration of egoism, and with examples of how they sinned against God.

The strange part of the psalm is the first stanza. Like Psalm 73, this psalm opens with a conclusion. The psalmist stresses the fact that God's goodness is greater than man's disobedience. In the words of the Apostle Paul: "Where sin increased, grace increased all the more."³⁰⁶ Man's wanderings and hardness of heart accentuates God's goodness and greatness. The emphasis in this psalm, therefore, is not on the failure of man (although the greater part of the psalm is taken up with that) but with praise to God and with an exhortation to man to avoid the incomprehensible foolishness of unbelief.

The psalm opens with the ritual words used in the temple service: "Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever."³⁰⁷ This does not necessarily mean that the psalm was written for use in the temple service, although that is a possibility. It does, however, give a lofty character to the poem. It contrasts God's eternal goodness with man's evil.

We have seen earlier that goodness and love are expressions of the male and female elements of God's character.³⁰⁸ Vs. 3 blesses the man who maintains justice but the implication is that justice is the principle that governs all God's acts. The verses 4 and 5 are a personal prayer that seems to be out of line with the general confession of sin that characterizes this psalm. It sounds as if the psalmist acts like the high priest who entered the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement to obtain propitiation for his own sin before he acted in behalf of all the people. So here the author asks for a personal blessing before he confesses the sins of Israel as a whole. This would express a messianic principle. "Oh, visit me with Your salvation" (NKJV) sounds more beautiful than the NIV's "come to my aid when you save them." How wonderful it is when we can say: "God has visited me with His salvation." Without a personal encounter with God we will never be able to be of any help to others.

It turns out that this psalm is not a litany of human failure but a model for intercession. The psalmist identifies himself with the people in his profound confession of sin. But, first of all, he identifies with God and His salvation. We cannot do the one without the other and the order is irreversible.

Seeing God's salvation is, not in the first place, a means to give personal fulfillment. We will find fulfillment if we see the good of others. The psalmist seeks the salvation of God's people, the joy of God's children, and the inheritance that God prepared for them. This is the blessing of the body of Christ, not of one individual alone.

The second stanza (verses 6-12) recounts Israel's condition at the Red Sea.³⁰⁹ The psalmist says: "We have sinned, even as our fathers did; we have done wrong and acted wickedly" but he does not specify what his sin and that of his generation consisted of. He only states that he and his kinsmen are no better than their ancestors. He confesses that they never learned the lessons of history.

What was Israel's sin at the shore of the Red Sea? We read in the Exodus account that God had foretold Moses and the people what would happen: "Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They are to encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon. Pharaoh will think, 'The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.' And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD."³¹⁰ But when things happen as God said they would, we read that the people "were terrified and cried out to the LORD." Exodus records: "As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. They said to Moses, 'Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!'"³¹¹ They paid no attention whatsoever to the Word of

³⁰⁶ Rom. 5:20^b

³⁰⁷ I Chr. 16:41^b

³⁰⁸ See Ps. 103:4

³⁰⁹ See Ex. 13:17-14:21

³¹⁰ Ex. 14:1-4

³¹¹ Ex. 14:10-12

God. They stated that it would have been better to continue serving the devil who wanted to kill them than to be delivered by God from the power of darkness. They wanted to be left alone.

A closer look at the psalmist's confession makes us see that what he confesses is rather strange. It is hard to believe that he would confess sins committed by his ancestors some 500 years earlier. It is rather an acknowledgment that the Israel God led out of Egypt never reached the goal God had set for them, and that he himself and his contemporaries are still as far removed from that goal as the people of earlier centuries. They conquered Canaan, but they never became what God wanted them to be. This is what the psalmist calls sin. The Hebrew word for sin is *chata'* or *`awah*, both meaning "to bend" or "to deviate from the way." The Greek word is *hamartain* which means "missing the goal." Sin is missing God's goal for one's life. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews makes this abundantly clear in his analysis of Psalm 95.³¹²

When the Israelites saw the dead bodies of the Egyptians washing ashore at the Red Sea, they briefly suspended their unbelief. This is evident from the Song of Moses and Miriam.³¹³ This hymn, however, was based on seeing not on blind faith. It is amazing to see how soon the people forgot God's miracles. The psalmist says in vs. 7: "They gave no thought to your miracles." The meaning of what they saw never penetrated their minds. When they found themselves at the shore of the Red Sea with the Egyptian army behind them, the miracles from Egypt were no longer relevant to them. Only after they had crossed the sea, did they see the relevancy and begin to praise God. Unbelief is linked to a lack of insight.

In the third stanza, the psalmist gives us some other synonyms for unbelief: "[They] did not wait for his counsel" (vs. 13), "they grew envious" (vs. 16), "[They] worshiped an idol" (vs. 19). We have again to remind ourselves that the psalmist is not trying "to rip up old sores." By drawing a parallel, he confesses the sins of his own time.

We conclude from vs. 13 that God had intended all the time to provide Israel with meat. The Israelites carried a good herd of cattle, goats, and sheep with them in their crossing of the desert. Otherwise, the commands regarding the bloody sacrifices would have made little sense. The first two years of the journey had not been meatless. But in Numbers we read: "The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, 'If only we had meat to eat!'"³¹⁴ The only thing the people remembered from Egypt was the fish, the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic." It is amazing to think that, looking back to Egypt, the people did not see images of children that were drowned in the Nile, but they only remembered the food! Most of God's children have not learned much about this matter either. Evidently, our memory is more governed by our stomach than by our heart. God never intended to make His people suffer hunger. He allowed them to pass through a few short and healthy periods of fasting in order to teach them "that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."³¹⁵ But the people of Israel were not interested in learning spiritual lessons. They wanted meat and they wanted it now.

Vs. 15 is one of the most tragic verses in the Bible: "So he gave them what they asked for, but sent a wasting disease upon them." The KJV puts it more succinctly: "And he gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul." They got what they wanted on the physical level but spiritually they starved to death. Our prayer life should never be governed by our desires. We ought to ask the Lord not to hear our prayers for things that are harmful for us. In this respect also we should pray: "Lord, teach us to pray!"³¹⁶

The sins in this stanza are not mentioned in chronological order but in order of seriousness. Envy is a greater sin than impatience, and idolatry removes man farther away from God than the first two. The event mentioned in verses 16-18 is the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.³¹⁷ The devil endeavors to make man sin, first of all, with his body, then with his soul, and finally, with his spirit. This demonic tactic is evinced in the order given here. Korah's envy was the product of his ego. This fits in the realm of the sins of the soul. God had appointed Moses, but he had never considered himself equal to this call. Korah chose himself for the task. He favored a democratic practice and announced his own candidacy. The incident highlights the difference between a man who has chosen God's will for his life, like Moses, and

³¹² Compare Ps. 95:7,8 with Heb. 3:7-4:11

³¹³ See Ex. 15:1-21

³¹⁴ Num. 11:4

³¹⁵ Deut. 8:3

³¹⁶ See Luke 11:1

³¹⁷ See Num. 16:1-17:13

the man who makes his own choices. The story reminds us how catastrophic the result of our own choices can be.

The worst part of the story is that Korah and his followers hid behind some pious pretexts. They called upon the presence of Yahweh in order to elevate themselves. Every man has value in the eyes of God. God honors the person who obeys Him. This honor should be more than enough to fully satisfy us spiritually and emotionally. In some cases, God adds the honor of other men to this, when He sees that we can accept that honor without becoming proud. The problems occur when we begin to seek the honor of others ourselves. Jesus told the people of His time how dangerous this could be. "How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?"³¹⁸ Korah and his followers had, obviously, never accepted the fact that God loved and honored them.

Korah, who was the leader of the rebellion, is not even mentioned by name in these verses. It is as if the Holy Spirit wants to say to us that the more we seek the limelight the less important we become. The absence of Korah's name also suggests that the general principle that is evinced in these verses is more important than the story of one individual.

The third example mentioned in these verses is Israel's idolatry when they made the Golden Calf at Sinai. This story is recorded in Exodus.³¹⁹ The Bible never explains clearly which role Aaron played in the making of the Golden Calf. Reading the account in Exodus, we get the impression that Aaron was one of the main delinquents, but he was never punished for his part. His sin may have been more a sin of omission in that he did not prevent the people and did not avert a catastrophe. He may have had more spiritual insight than we give him credit for. If he had been an instigator in the movement to break with God, he would, undoubtedly, never have been appointed high priest shortly afterward. The only indication of Aaron's guilt we have is in Moses' review of the desert journey in Deuteronomy. Speaking about the making of the Golden Calf, he said: "And the LORD was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him, but at that time I prayed for Aaron too."³²⁰

In this psalm the full blame for this act of idolatry falls upon the people. The psalmist suggests that the people dishonored themselves in worshipping the Golden Calf. He who glorifies the living God brings honor and glory to himself. God not only honors the person who obeys Him, but He becomes man's honor. The psalmist calls God "their Glory." David says: "My salvation and my honor depend on God."³²¹ The person who turns away from God denigrates himself. We always bear the image of the God or the god we worship.

It is clear that behind all idolatry is satanic activity. The calf had no meaning in itself. The evil part was that it represented an Egyptian demon. Worse than that, in the Festival to Jehovah,³²² the Lord and Satan were put on the same level. The people said about the calf that it had led them out of Egypt. They could not have insulted God in a worse way. The essence of Israel's sin was the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit of which Jesus speak in Matthew's Gospel.³²³

In these verses, however, the psalmist does not emphasize the demonic aspect in the worship of the Golden Calf but rather the ridiculous idea to make an image of God in the form of something that, in order of creation, is lower than man himself. He says: "They exchanged their Glory for an image of a bull, which eats grass." The people had erased from their memory all the supernatural manifestations they had experienced shortly before this. It was as if the plagues of Egypt and their passage through the Red Sea had failed to leave an imprint upon them. They were spiritually dead; nothing God did made any impression.

We mentioned earlier that the order of events given in this psalm suggests that this condition is the result of a growing process, rather than a state that existed from the onset. The people began by giving in to their physical desires and, following this, they obeyed the dictates of their ego. They finally came to the point where they could no longer hear the voice of the Lord.

Moses' intercessory prayer is one of the highlights of the Old Testament.³²⁴ It stands on the same level as Paul's testimony in Romans: "For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ

³¹⁸ John 5:44

³¹⁹ See Ex. ch. 32

³²⁰ Deut. 9:20

³²¹ Ps. 62:7

³²² See Ex. 5:1

³²³ See Matt. 12:31,32

³²⁴ See Ex. 32:30-32

for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race.”³²⁵ It is a demonstration of genuine love if someone is willing to die for someone else. That is the essence of *agape* in the Bible. This willingness to give up one’s own salvation, not in order to indulge in sin but out of love for someone else, goes even deeper. It is, of course, physically and morally impossible for man to exchange his own salvation in behalf of someone else. Only Jesus experienced this when, on the cross, God forsook him. But even Jesus’ experience was transitory. The paradox remains that we can keep only what we are willing to give up. No one is more saved than he who is willing to lose his salvation for the sake of others.

This willingness is no evidence of human greatness or nobility but of the influence of God’s presence upon man. Such thoughts and words are obviously the fruit of the Holy Spirit in one’s life. As a young Christian, I once heard a sermon in which the preacher spoke about some people who were willing to die for Jesus Christ. I knew then that I was not and I am stilling striving toward that willingness. Moses’ willingness to go beyond the limit of human sacrifice meant the salvation of Israel as a nation. Moses did not perform any specific act but with his attitude he broke the spell in which Satan had held the people captive.

The next stanza (verses 24-27) tells the story of Israel’s unwillingness to enter the Promised Land.³²⁶ The people were about to reach their destination. That moment ought to have been a highlight in their existence as a nation. They had just passed through two years of miracles. It becomes obvious that at that point they had never understood anything of God’s plan for their lives. It was a foregone conclusion to them that the inhabitants of Canaan would defeat them. They became so obsessed by this inevitable defeat that it seemed preferable to them to die in Egypt or in the desert. All of a sudden, Egypt, the land of the murder of their children, of slavery, and of inhuman suffering, appeared to them in a rosy light. Back to Egypt! It never dawned on them how insane their reasoning was. Evidently, nobody indulged in any reasoning at all. Unbelief and nonsense always go together, just as faith and logic belong to each other.

It all began with a giving in to carnal desires. This was followed by an indulging in ambitious thoughts and, finally, their thought-life became confused. The devil had reached his goal with them. They could no longer hear the voice of the Lord. It was all their own fault.

At this point in their history, the psalmist takes a strange step forward. He exploits the laws of poetry to their extremes in the verses 26 and 27. When God swore an oath in answer to Israel’s unbelief, there was no mention that He would “make their descendants fall among the nations and scatter them throughout the lands.” This threat is found in another context in Leviticus, where we read: “I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins.”³²⁷ The poet reduces all to the same denominator in order to indicate that unbelief and disobedience is the main factor that ties generations together. People will be born and die and faith and holiness are not hereditary. The devil, however, will see to it that every generation is tempted with the same temptations. C. S. Lewis, in his *Chronicles of Narnia*, observes that the color of the witches may change from generation to generation, but they all have the same goal.

The story of Israel’s idolatry and the sexual immorality committed with the women of the Baal of Peor is recorded in Numbers.³²⁸ Balaam’s blessing pronounced over Israel preceded this incident.³²⁹ We only read in passing that Balaam had been instrumental in this temptation. Speaking about the women of Moab, Moses said: “They were the ones who followed Balaam’s advice and were the means of turning the Israelites away from the LORD in what happened at Peor, so that a plague struck the LORD’s people.”³³⁰ Balaam had evaluated Israel correctly. In spite of his prophetic gift, he was morally completely corrupt. The psalmist calls the youthful enthusiasm of Phinehas who killed Zimri and Cozbi inside the holy place in the tabernacle³³¹ an act of righteousness. Balaam’s plan did not succeed, but it cost the lives of 24,000 Israelites. And Balaam himself was not able to enjoy the payment for his prophecy for long. He was killed in Israel’s raid upon Midian.

³²⁵ Rom. 9:3

³²⁶ See Num. 14:1-38

³²⁷ Lev. 26:33

³²⁸ See Num. Ch. 25

³²⁹ See Num. Ch. 22-24

³³⁰ Num. 31:16

³³¹ See Num. 25:6-15

We usually realize little how cruel the idolatry of the people of Canaan was. Even in the section in Deuteronomy that refers to it there is only casual mention of the sins of the Canaanites.³³² Those words were originally not addressed to Westerners of the twentieth century who don't understand the issues but to people who were familiar with the practices of the Canaanites. We can learn more from archeology on these matters than from the Bible. Little children were murdered in the idol rituals and spiritualism had a heyday. General conditions were so horrible and perverse that God could no longer stand the stench of Canaan. If we understand this, we see the seemingly harsh measures against Israel's infidelity in a different light.

In verses 32 and 33, the psalmist puts most of the blame for Moses' sin at Meribah³³³ on the people; although God had held Moses and Aaron personally responsible.

The verses 34-46 deal with the whole period of history that begins in the Book of Judges and ends with the captivity. The question remains, however, whether this psalm was written before the captivity began or during that time. The verses 43 and 46: "Many times he delivered them, but they were bent on rebellion and they wasted away in their sin.... He caused them to be pitied by all who held them captive" do not necessarily apply to the Babylonian captivity. Some commentators take the stand that these verses pertain to an earlier period. But the question is irrelevant. The important matter is that people, who had been saved and set aside by God, easily and without any signs of remorse, began to dabble in the kingdom of darkness and felt perfectly content to do so.

Seen from a humane perspective, it seems inhumane and cruel that Israel was ordered to exterminate whole nations. This seems hard to reconcile with God's love and goodness. If Israel had taken the initiative for this, the matter would have been dubious indeed. It is clear, however, that Israel merely carried out God's orders. The drying up of the Jordan River, the fall of Jericho, and the standing still of the sun clearly prove that God was in this.

We should also keep in mind that God had exercised patience for four centuries. God had said to Abraham: "In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."³³⁴ God spoke those words against a background of "a thick and dreadful darkness."

It is also clear that Israel's halfhearted way of carrying out God's orders had disastrous effects. Israel became infected with the sins of Canaan, the very sins they ought to have exterminated. Paul's words applied here: "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."³³⁵

Israel's tragedy was that "they did more evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites."³³⁶ Not only did they learn to practice the sins of the people, which they had not driven, but out they became more proficient than their teachers! With their acts they desecrated the land that should have been their resting place, and the land spewed out its inhabitants.

The expressions we find in the verses 43-47 are borrowed from the whole of Israel's history, starting with the Book of Judges up to and including the captivity. God's compassing for the fate of His people is evident from a verses in Judges: "And he could bear Israel's misery no longer."³³⁷ This corresponds with the words of the psalmist: "But he took note of their distress when he heard their cry; for their sake he remembered his covenant and out of his great love he relented."

In vs. 46, we hear the same sounds as in Solomon's prayer for the dedication of the temple: "When they sin against you-for there is no one who does not sin-and you become angry with them and give them over to the enemy, who takes them captive to his own land, far away or near; and if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their conquerors and say, 'We have sinned, we have done wrong, we have acted wickedly'; and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies who took them captive, and pray to you toward the land you gave their fathers, toward the city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name; then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause. And forgive your people, who have sinned against you; forgive all the offenses they have committed against

³³² See Deut. 18:9-14

³³³ See Num. 20:2-13

³³⁴ Gen. 15:16

³³⁵ Eph. 6:12

³³⁶ II Chr. 33:9

³³⁷ Judges 10:16^b

you, and cause their conquerors to show them mercy; for they are your people and your inheritance, whom you brought out of Egypt, out of that iron-smelting furnace.”³³⁸

Vs. 47 suggests a more massive captivity than what is recorded in the Old Testament. We can interpret this as a prophecy about the Diaspora in New Testament times.

As we saw earlier, the tension in this psalm consists in the comparison between Israel’s failure in their relationship to God and the actuality of the life of the psalmist, of which we are given no information. The core of the psalm is expressed in vs. 6: “We have sinned, even as our fathers did; we have done wrong and acted wickedly.” This becomes a bridge to the *ekklesia* of the New Testament. God calls us unto Himself from among the nations. And this call becomes the basis for our confession of sin. We find the answer to the questions this psalm asks in Paul’s words to the Galatians: “[Christ] gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.”³³⁹ Israel’s sin consisted in the fact that they refused to be rescued.

The ultimate goal of our salvation is that God be praised. There is no more fitting place in the Book of Psalms to insert a doxology than the end of Psalm 106, which concludes this fourth book. God’s praise is founded upon His eternal love. God’s plan of salvation is so marvelous no human mind could have conceived it, and “even angels long to look into these things.”

The doxology that concludes this Fourth Book of Psalms is almost identical with the one that closes the first book.³⁴⁰ The only difference is in the last line. Instead of “Amen and Amen” there is “Let all the people say, ‘Amen!’ Praise the LORD.” Only TLB says: “Let all the people say, Amen!’ Hallelujah!”

³³⁸ I Kings 8:46-51

³³⁹ Gal. 1:4

³⁴⁰ See Ps. 41:13