

END OF PSALM 89

You are Psalms

Some people think you never get discouraged, but the fact is, when you do, you know where to run. Your prayers are open and honest because you realize that God already knows your heart, He's just waiting to hear you spill it. And when you do, what starts out as heavy ends up becoming a song of praise. You may struggle... and often you do... but each time, you grow in your understanding of God's faithfulness. You're just a song waiting to happen.

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PSALMS (SONGS OF PRAISE)

TRUST
IN THE
LORD *and do good;*
dwell in the land and
enjoy safe pasture.
PSALM 36: 3

PSALM NUMBER: 89

**A prayer for the mercy of God:
recounting the shortness and miseries of the days of man.**

1. Lord, thou hast been our refuge from generation to generation.
2. Before the mountains were made, or the earth and the world was formed; from eternity and to eternity thou art God.
3. Turn not man away to be brought low: and thou hast said; Be converted, O ye sons of men.
4. For a thousand years in thy sight are as yesterday, which is past. And as a watch in the night.
5. Things that are counted nothing, shall their years be.
6. In the morning man shall grow up like grass, in the morning he shall flourish and pass away; in the evening he shall fall, grow dry and wither.
7. For in thy wrath we have fainted away; and are troubled in thy indignation.
8. Thou hast set our iniquities before thy eyes: our life in the light of thy countenance.
9. For all our days are spent; and in thy wrath we have fainted away. Our years shall be considered as a spider:
10. The days of our years in them are threescore and ten years. But if in the strong they be fourscore years: and what is more of them is labor and sorrow. For mildness is come upon us: and we shall be corrected.
11. Who knoweth the power of thy anger, and for thy fear
12. Can number thy wrath? So make thy right hand known: and men learned in heart, in wisdom.
13. Return, O Lord, how long? And be intreated in favor of thy servants.
14. We are filled in the morning with thy mercy: and we have rejoiced, and are delighted all our days.
15. We have rejoiced for the days in which thou hast humbled us: for the years in which we have seen evils.
16. Look upon thy servants and upon their works: and direct their children.
17. And let the brightness of the Lord our God be upon us: and direct thou the works of our hands over us; yea, the work of our hands do thou direct.

The Psalms are songs of praise and cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.). They deal with selected events of that period and provide us with the thoughts and feelings of those who went through the experiences recorded. After being made a Cardinal by Pope Clement VIII, Saint Robert Bellarmine, prepared for posterity his very own commentary on each of the Psalms. Enclosed are his interpretations on each of the Psalms.

PSALM NUMBER: 89

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. "Lord, thou hast been our refuge from generation to generation." The Prophet begins his prayer by returning thanks for past favors; for he then seeks for fresh favors can make use of no argument so convincing as the showing himself grateful for the past. "Lord, thou hast been our refuge." We allow we are subject to many and various dangers, but we have found a helper and a protector in you, and that not once or twice, but always, "from generation to generation." The Hebrew for refuge signifies a well fortified house, placed on an eminence, the tenants of which are quite secure from their enemies, from beasts, from flood and from storms. And, in fact, they have recourse to God, and dwell in him, by constant reflection and daily desire for him, dwell as they would in a city fortified by faith, hope, and charity, and are most secure from all evil; for, with such persons, "all things work together unto good."

2. "Before the mountains were made, or the earth and the world was formed; from eternity and to eternity thou art God." He proves that the very same God might have been a refuge to those who hoped in him at all times; for he is always the same, especially powerful, wise, and kind; and, to show that God existed before all these things that man confides so much in, he first names the mountains. "Before the mountains were made;" for the mountains, being of great altitude and solidity, afford man a refuge in many ways; or, perhaps, he names the mountains first, by reason of their having been the first to appear when the waters that covered them at the creation began to recede; or, perhaps, because the mountains form a conspicuous and considerable portion of the earth. "From eternity and to eternity thou art God;" you existed not only before the earth and the mountains, but from eternity thou art, and to eternity thou art God. And, observe, he does not say, Thou hast been, and will be God, but, Thou art God, in order to show the true eternity of God, in which there is no past or future, but one continuity of existence, without any change or variety, to which he alludes in Psalm 101, where he says, "but thou art always the selfsame, and thy years shall not fail."

3. "Turn not man away to be brought low: and thou hast said: be converted, O ye sons of men." Now begins the prayer the Prophet puts up to God, begging of him not to allow mankind to lapse into extreme degradation and ruin. For he saw that man, estranged from God by the sin of our first parents, was rushing headlong to destruction, and he, therefore, exclaims, "turn not man away to be brought low." Do

17. "And let the brightness of the Lord our God be upon us: and direct thou the works of our hands over us: yea, the work of our hands do thou direct." In order to show how extremely desirous he is to get what he asks, he repeats the same petition in different language, for the expression, "but the brightness of our Lord be upon us," is the same as "look upon thy servants;" for God, as we already said, when he looks on us enlightens us; when he turns his face away, he leaves us in darkness; and the expression, "and upon their works," in the previous verse, he repeats here when he says, "and direct thou the works of our hands over us;" that is to say, by overseeing us, makes us to work as we ought, and always to follow that most correct rule, thy will and thy law. He adds, "yea, the works of our hands do thou direct;" to show that all our works may be brought under one head, that is, charity, the root of all, and containing all, "for he that loveth his neighbors hath fulfilled the law," and, "charity is kind, is patient."

13. "Return; O Lord, how long? And be entreated in favor of thy servants." He repeats the same prayer, but in more general terms, saying, having been angry with us, by reason of our sins, you have turned your face away from us; but, as you have been appeased, turn to us at length and look upon us with an eye of kindness. "And be entreated in favor of thy servants." Do not be inexorable, but listen to your servants, whom you have created, and whom you nourish and support for your service.

14. "We are filled in the morning with thy mercy and we have rejoiced, and are delighted all our days."

15. "We have rejoiced for the days in which thou hast humbled us: for the years in which we have seen evils" When we shall have been reconciled to God, when he shall have been "entreated in favor of his servants," that we can justly say, "we are filled in the morning with thy mercy;" that is to say, in the beginning of that real day that we began to see the Sun of Justice, without any cloud to hide it from us, and the night and the darkness of this life had disappeared, we have been filled with that great mercy of yours, that totally excluded all misery and trouble, of which it is written in Psalm 102, "who crowneth thee with mercy and compassion, who healeth all thy diseases, who satisfieth thy desire with good things;" therefore, "we have rejoiced and are delighted;" for all that is left to the blessed, when freed from their sins, is to exult in praising God, and revel in the delight of having got possession of him. And we have rejoiced, not only for such a load of favors, but we have even "rejoiced for the days in which thou hast humbled us," and for "the years in which we have seen evils; both because prosperity is much sweeter to those who have tasted of adversity, and because our own patience in adversity had some share in this return of prosperity; according to the apostle, 2 Cor. 4, "for our present tribulation, which is momentary and light, worketh, for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory." Thus, we now bless those days and years in which our patience was tested, and we thank God, who did not spare us here below, that he may be able to do so for eternity.

16. "Look upon thy servants and upon their works: and direct their children." After he had asked for that supreme good that is the ultimate end of man's life, and of all our actions, he now asks for the means of acquiring it; that is to say, the grace of doing good. For, according to our Lord, we must "seek first the kingdom of God and his justice;" he, therefore, says, "look upon thy servants;" enlighten thy servants and inflame them with thy love; for God is the increate sun, who by one look both illuminates and enlivens. Also, "look upon thy servants" with an eye of favor and benevolence, and direct, protect, and further them, as belonging to you; "and upon their works;" the good works you have caused them to commence; for God is said to perform all our good works in us, because it is by his help and assistance they are done, and without his grace, both preceding them and accompanying them, they would be of no value whatever. And look upon, not only thy servants, but "direct their children" also; whether their natural, or their spiritual children; that under thy guidance, both parents and children may persevere in the path of your commandments, and thus deserve to reach life everlasting.

not suffer mankind to be turned away from the light of your countenance, to extreme wretchedness and meanness, so as to forget what is really good, and to turn to the things of the earth and the clay of secular desires, and thus be consigned to eternal perdition. And he assigns a reason for its not being meet that God should suffer a creature so noble as man to be lost. For "thou hast said: be converted, O ye sons of men;" that is to say, by the preaching of your prophets, and by your own secret inspirations, you have invited sinners; and you, therefore, by the powerful succor of your grace, should help the sinner in the way of his conversion, and not suffer him to sink to the depth of wretchedness.

4. "For a thousand years in thy sight are as yesterday, which is past. And as a watch in the night."

5. "Things that are counted nothing, shall their years be." He now describes the abject state of the human race after the fall of man, by comparing the shortness of man's life with God's eternity. God's eternity is so immense that thousand years with him are but as part of a day with us; and yet, by reason of the fall of man, our life is not one of thousand years, nor of a hundred, but scarcely of seventy, or with the more robust, of eighty. Our life, then, as compared with the existence of God, is less than that of one day, nay more, or even part of a day; and yet, had man not fallen into sin, he would have lived to eternity. "For a thousand years in thy sight are as yesterday, which is past." We are come to the lowest degree of wretchedness; for, while your existence is that of eternity, so that thousand years are as but one day, that quickly passes with you, or, "as a watch in the night," three hours; the life of man, who was created to your image, and, therefore, should have been everlasting, is now so brief that it may be looked upon as nothing of it: for "things that are counted nothing, shall their years be;" very short and next to nothing.

6. "In the morning man shall grow up like grass, in the morning he shall flourish and pass away: in the evening he shall fall, grow dry and wither." To show how contemptible is the life of man, he compares it to grass, that in one day springs up, flowers, withers, and perishes. "In the morning," in the early part of the day, man will appear in his youth, like the verdant grass, and will not stop there, but will pass on; in the morning again, in the early part of the day, "he will flourish" in the vigor of youth; and will again pass on; "in the evening," in another part of the same day, "he shall fall," his strength will begin to fail, "grow dry and wither" in his old age, in death, when all his bodily powers shall have been wasted. Alas, the blindness of mankind, that loves the existence of one day, that ought to be looked upon as of no value, as if it were eternity! David is not alone in denouncing such folly; for in Job 14, we read, "man, born of a woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries. Who cometh forth like a flower, and is destroyed, and fleeth as a shadow, and never continueth in the same state." And after him, Isaias, on the same subject, says, "all flesh is grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of the field. The grass is withered, and the flower is fallen, because the Spirit of the Lord hath blown upon it.

7. "For in thy wrath we have fainted away; and are troubled in thy indignation." He assigns a cause for the shortness of human life, and says it proceeds from the just anger of God, roused by the perversity of man. "For in thy wrath we have fainted away;" we have been consumed and become mortal, by having provoked your anger; "and are troubled;" we, who previously led a life of quiet and security, are now troubled with the fear and horror of death, by reason of your anger. God does not get into anger or into rage, or into any excitement, by the he is said figuratively to be so when he does not spare the sinner, but punishes him according to his merits.

8. "Thou hast set our iniquities before the eyes: our life in the light of thy countenance." Having said that God's anger was the cause of the shortness of our life, he now says that our sins are the cause of God's anger. He calls the sin of our first parents our sin, because it was common to us, and comprised many sins, pride, disobedience, infidelity, curiosity, and other sins. Perhaps David also took in the sins of posterity as the cause of our life being shortened; for, up to the deluge, men lived to be nine hundred years; after the deluge, to two and three hundred years; and, in Moses' time, to a hundred and twenty; and, finally, in the time of David, to eighty years. He, therefore, says, "thou hast set out iniquities before thy eyes;" you would not, in your mercy, hide our sins, but you put them right before you, that you may consider on them and punish them. For God is considered as forgiving sin when he turns his face away from it, as the Prophet says, in Psalm 50, "turn away thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities." - "Our life in the light of thy countenance;" is only a repetition of the first part of this verse; for "our life" means the iniquities of our life, which God, for fear they should escape him, placed "in the light of his countenance;" so lighted and showed up that their hideousness may be apparent to all, and punished by the just judgment of God.

9. "For all our days are spent; and in thy wrath we have fainted away. Our years shall be considered as a spider." The very punishment of death inflicted on us proves that God saw and condemned our delinquencies. "For all our days are spent;" our life has passed away, none of it now remains; "and in thy wrath we have fainted away;" not only have our days been spent, but ourselves are spent with them; for, if Adam had not revolted, our days would have passed away, but they would have been succeeded by other days, and we would not have fainted away; but, at present, our days flow on so as to come to an end by the intervention of death; and we come to an end with them, and are destroyed by the anger of God, justly punishing us for our sins. "Our years shall be considered as a spider." Having said that death is the punishment of sin, he now adds that life itself, previous to death, is both wretched and short, according to the patriarch Jacob. "The days of my pilgrimage are hundred and thirty years, few and evil;" and of their wretchedness he says, "our years shall be considered as a spider;" as the spider's who occupation consists in weaving flimsy webs, that have no substance or duration, and which waste the body of the spider itself, so is the whole period of our life devoted to idle labor and pain, harassed by fear and suspicions, in running after the imaginary goods of this world, and guarding against its evils.

10. "The days of our years in them are threescore and ten years. But if in the strong they be fourscore years: and what is more of them is labor and sorrow. For mildness is come upon us: and we shall be corrected." He now passes from the misery to the shortness of our life, saying: the term of our life is marked and defined, averaging seventy years; a few of the more robust may reach eighty; but if they go beyond that, their life is one of infirmity, pain, and trouble. Hale and robust people are to be found after their eightieth year, to be sure, but there is no rule without an exception; and if; previous to the deluge, men lived to be eight and nine hundred years, that was necessary for the propagation of the human race, as it afterwards, in God's providence, became necessary to curtail the life of man, in order to prevent an excess of population, as well as to punish men for their sins. "For mildness is come upon us, and we shall be corrected." The evils of old-age bring this much good with them, that they make us lay aside our pride and the vanity of youth, they make us conscious of our own infirmity, and thus we become humbled, mild, and corrected under the powerful hand of God.

11. "Who knoweth the power of thy anger, and for thy fear."

12. "Can number thy wrath? So make thy right hand known, and men learned in heart, in wisdom." The Prophet infers from the severity of the punishment inflicted for the sin of our first father, that God's anger and severity, in regard of sin, is very great, and makes use of a beautiful figure of speech to express it. "Who knoweth the power of thy anger." Who can possibly conceive the force, power, and effects of your anger? "And for thy fear can number thy wrath?" Who can fear you as you ought to be feared, and in such fear to measure the extent of your anger, or enumerate the various modes of punishment? For as God was so incensed against all mankind for the one sin of our first parents, so as to condemn them to a life of pain, labor, and trouble here, and afterwards to death, to a return to the dust from whence they came, it certainly may be fairly inferred, that God's anger to the sinner must be boundless, and that he has countless modes of punishing the sinner. And if the magnitude of God's anger to the sinner is to be inferred from the corporal death so inflicted on him, who can possibly conceive or comprehend the extent of that anger, not satisfied with the death of that wretched body, without consigning both soul and body, on the day of judgment, to everlasting and inextinguishable fire? It far exceeds the understanding of man! "So make thy right hand known: and men learned in heart, in wisdom" From hence to the end of the Psalm the Prophet prays to God, that as he was pleased, in his justice, to shorten the life of man, he may now, in his mercy, look down upon and help man in his pilgrimage here below. "So make thy right hand known." Do, O Lord, at last stretch out your right-hand to us, to sustain and support us, and to give us, in abundance, the gifts of your grace. "And men learned in heart, in wisdom." Prophets and apostles with hearts fully imbued with the true wisdom, not like the wise ones of this world, whose tongue may be polished, but whose heart is not, or, if it be, it is not with wholesome and salutary wisdom, but with the pernicious wisdom of the world, "which puffeth up, and does not edify."